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Between Speech and Silence in Wordsworth's *The Prelude* —Transformation of Self in Text

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Abstract

The article focuses on William Wordsworth's self-representation in Book V of *The Prelude*. I will consider Wordsworth's "textual self" in the draft materials and revisions of this Book in order to explore the vital relationship between Wordsworth and his text, and to observe how he writes his complicated emotions into the process of composition. Wordsworth's represented self vanishes into language in his act of writing. Wordsworth, engaging with the "counter-spirit" of language, represents a self overwhelmed by the "loud blast" from writing itself and defaced by its substitutive figurations. However, I will argue that, in response to the failure of self-representation, Wordsworth transforms his vision of the "weak[ness] of words" into an opportunity for the working of language itself. I will add to Paul de Man and Mary Jacobus' largely

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negative reading of Wordsworth's language by focusing on the positive use Wordsworth makes of the "texture" midway between "life and books." For Wordsworth, the "visionary power" in the "mystery of words" is capable of visioning at least the "presence" of the represented self. I show, in particular, how Wordsworth communicates a sense of self in language precisely by signalling its absence from that language. He does this by situating his self-representation midway between speech and silence, acknowledging but resisting the working of "darkness" and "shadowy things" in "the mystery of words." Through his precisely inconsistent and opaque use of language, Wordsworth's writing avoids the total "defacement" of the "unrepresentable" self in words.

Key Words: William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, mystery of words, self-representation, the "counter-spirit" of language

I. Introduction

In *The Prelude*, William Wordsworth seeks to establish a stable poetic identity for himself through the examination of recollected earlier selves. Books I and II of *The Prelude* describe the way time fractures Wordsworth's consciousness in the transitions between a range of temporalities and the way he attempts to use language to stabilize his identity. However, his "two consciousnesses"—"consciousness of myself / And of some other Being" (1991a: 125)—are further problematized by the experience of the French Revolution. Wordsworth's complex feelings towards the Revolution, as we can see in Book X, further fragment the identity to be dealt with in his large project of self-identification. His self-doubt in the aftermath of the Revolution relentlessly undermines his childhood bond with nature. The uncertain fissures between past and present are *The Prelude's* greatest philosophical problems—but they also present some of the greatest poetic opportunities of the poem. Book V of *The Prelude* focuses on Wordsworth's self-representation in his poetic development of a self-identity. Constantly engaged with the otherness of language in his self-formation, he comes to recognize that a new self can be developed in the act of writing—a self that is not based on a timeless recovery of the past, but an imaginative rewriting of it. This leads into the apocalypse of the imagination in Book VI, and the transcendence of this by the "mighty mind" (315) in Book XIII. In these two Books, we can observe the complexity with which Wordsworth's language works to construct, but also problematize, his encounter with nature and the imagination. In his introspective project of self-formation, Wordsworth continually questions the very purpose and value of his own project. Working closely with language and time, he keeps rewriting and revising his sense of the poet he feels himself to be, wants to be, and fears he might not be.

This article focuses on Book V of *The Prelude*—"Books"—and will read as composed, that is, as a series of fictional

epitaphs to himself. Book V rewrites Wordsworth's past self into the figures of the Arab and the Boy of Winander, whom he can reread as instancing his present understanding of the past self "hidden in its endless home / Among the depths of time" (W. Wordsworth, 1991a: 167). The stories of these figures focus on a space between speech and silence in which the present moment of writing recollection is haunted by the silence of the past. In this fiction, the figures are Wordsworth's self-representations, and so not identical with Wordsworth himself. In other words, by talking of his past self in the writing of memory, Wordsworth is actually writing a "Tale" (a fiction) of his previous life. Through the figures of the Arab (who was doomed by the "prophetic blast" from the Book of the Shell) and the Boy of Winander (who fell into death after he lost his previous correspondence with nature), Wordsworth explores the ways in which the self vanishes into any language used to represent it. In Paul de Man's view, language entombs Wordsworth's self in writing. He thinks that "the 'now' of the poem is not an actual now, which is that of the moment of death" (1971: 208). The textual "I" is always different from the writing subject—and different from the subject of autobiographical writing. Indeed, a sense of absence always lurks beneath every textual "I" because there can never be any direct link connecting language and all the past—and present—selves who use it.

I will follow Wordsworth's unwinding of the relationship between speech, silence, and death in Book V. The stories of these figures in Book V focus on a space between speech and silence in which the present moment of writing recollection is nevertheless haunted by precisely the "Phantoms" of the past. Indeed, in the dream of the Arab there is, in the seashell, an echo that awaits "destruction" by "deluge" (W. Wordsworth, 1991a: 165), while in the Boy of Winander passage, when the "echoes" from the owls cease, there are "pauses of deep silence" that anticipate the boy's death (172). The past may leave only silence, but it is a silence that speaks of the fact of our mortality. This ambiguous relationship

between Wordsworth and his self-representations in Book V will be examined closely in this article.

My article shows that Wordsworth is unable, and knows full well that he is unable, to achieve full communion with his self through autobiographical writing precisely because that self is located in the silence left by "life" and not in the language left by "books." As the poet states in Book V, "Thou also, man, hast wrought, / For commerce of thy nature with itself, / Things worthy of unconquerable life!" (W. Wordsworth, 1991a: 163); however, these "things" "must perish" (163) when they are communicated through "books" "wrought" by "man," including "the consecrated works of bard and sage" (163). "Books" are compared to "shrines" written to "enshrine the spirit of the past / For future restoration" (163, 303), but Wordsworth views them as "frail" "shrines" (163) and "poor earthly casket of immortal verse" (166). Writing fictional selves as projections of his own self in Book V,¹ Wordsworth is also aware that the working of "darkness" and "shadowy things" (177) in language itself immediately replaces his own subjectivity by determining the absence behind the "I" of his self-composition. In this sense, the represented self of Wordsworth vanishes behind the language of his act of autobiographical writing. However, this article argues that, in Wordsworth's autobiographical writing, "darkness" and "shadowy things" in "the mystery of words" (177) facilitate, rather than hinder, the construction of a poetic identity. In response to the failure of self-representation in writing, Wordsworth also claims that he can somehow retain, in the act of writing, something of the "texture" of at least a sense of self that exists "midway betwixt life and books" (149) even as his past passes "into Phantoms" as he writes.

¹ Several studies think that these fictional figures in Book V of *The Prelude* are actually projections of Wordsworth's self. For example, William H. Galperin says that "Through the Arab dream, Wordsworth—the resisting writer—depicts himself, 'the Poet,' for what he is: a crazed, deluded wanderer implicated in a mythic or representational structure that is uncompletable" (1986: 621).

I claim that Wordsworth locates his self in the silence left by “life” in order to protect it from being “deface[d]” (de Man, 1979a: 930) by language. The self, represented through Wordsworth’s writing, is a voiceless self, a “sense” of self. Its local habitation is “midway betwixt” speech and silence—drawn forth by the act of writing about it, but never caught by, or in, that writing. As such, its existence can be inferred from speech, but never articulated by speech—nor shared through poetry.²

On the issue of Wordsworth’s self-composition, Andrew Bennett remarks that “his topic is, above all, the way in which the poet, the man, is composed by, composed in, poetic composition, in writing . . . Wordsworth, Wordsworth especially in writing, is his own exemplary moment” (2007: 6). Bennett goes on to state, “In recent decades critics have tended to complicate the idea of autobiography in relation to *The Prelude* by considering ways in which the poem not only represents the poet but also in some way forms and informs that subjectivity” (141). Wordsworth “composed by” and “in” writing is the focus of this article. In this very “self-composition,” it is exactly Wordsworth’s “two consciousnesses” that “complicate” the way the poem “forms and informs” his “subjectivity.” The “subjectivity” formed in Wordsworth’s self-representation is highly unstable because of its ambiguous status as both his sense of self and “some other Being.” The self represented in Wordsworth’s writing is a fictional

² The problem of selfhood involved here—the “in-between” aspects of a self both in and out of control—has been well discussed by some theorists. Frances Ferguson states that, in Wordsworth “an education into selfhood involves disclosing the patterns of internal annexation of others which is the fundamental and inescapable mode of the affection” (1977: 150). The idea of “others” contributes to one’s conflicting “drives,” which form “a warlike man” (Nietzsche, 1968: 76). According to Nietzsche, there are multiple drives competing within us for dominance, so there is no will that is purely one’s own but “the will of another [affect]” (117). In Nietzsche’s view, the consciousness must be re-conceptualized because the self harbours “multiple drives”; self-conscious choice and the reflective assessment of motives are determined by drives which actively look for opportunities for expression.

Wordsworth, but this imaginary self-representation forms the very subjectivity it purports to represent. In the act of writing, Wordsworth (re)creates himself as “the man” “composed” by writing itself.

De Man claims that Wordsworth writes “a tombstone large enough to hold the entire *Prelude*,” and that Wordsworth’s autobiographical writing is a “tombstone” (symbolized by “the Grave” [W. Wordsworth, 1991a: 172] in Book V, for example) for his past self—“someone who no longer lives” (1987: 9). Language itself predetermines the absence of the poet’s own subjectivity in his autobiographical writing. Even the existence of every written self is unpreservable, doomed to the slow physical decay of the books themselves. For Wordsworth, a book, “a volume in [his] hand,” is a “poor earthly casket of immortal Verse!” (1991a: 166).

Wordsworth’s writing of self-representation is constantly involved with his very perplexed thinking about language and books. Desperately, the poet asks “wherefore should I speak, / Why call upon a few weak words to say / What is already written in the hearts / Of all that breathe!” (W. Wordsworth, 1991a: 166). He thinks that “words” are “weak” and that “letter[s]” are “dead” (222). On Wordsworth’s notion of “weak words,” de Man claims that the “language of tropes” is “like the body, which is like its garments, the veil of the soul as the garment is the sheltering veil of the body” (1979a: 930). This relationship between language and self is like that between “the body” and “the soul”; the latter is “veil[ed]” in writing, buried deep beneath “the body” and “the garment,” as an “unrepresentable presence” (Jacobus, 1979: 620). The “soul” cannot be incarnated but only covered by the body, retaining its “presence” but remaining forever “unrepresentable.” Language takes on the role of a “sheltering veil,” an article of “clothing,” rather than “an incarnation” of whatever is represented by it. In this sense, words are “weak,” unable to say “what is already written in the hearts.”

II. The “Otherness” of Language

Wordsworth, perplexed by the “otherness” of language, views words more as “an ill gift,” “poisoned vestments,” and even “a counter-spirit” than as “an incarnation of the thought” (1974: 84-85).³ In de Man’s view, language working as “a counter-spirit” in its act of representation “deprives and disfigures to the precise extent that it restores [mortality]” (1979a: 930). For Wordsworth, language can be “a counter-spirit” to his own consciousness when he recognizes the “awful” power of words that holds “above all other external powers a dominion over thoughts.” Language both “domin[ates]” and counteracts his subjectivity in writing. Bennett states that “poetry, writing, often appears to involve a resistance to thinking;” he thinks of “writing as *against* philosophy, against thinking” (2007: 137, 139), whereas my discussion suggests that Wordsworth’s writing is not resistant to thought so much as to the power of language to *detach* itself from thought. De Man claims that “death is a displaced name for a linguistic predicament” (1979a: 930). Mary Jacobus also sees in Wordsworth’s writing “the anxious relation between . . . writing and salvation [of his self]” (1979: 624) while insisting “the language of books can only ever be the history of itself” (1989: 158). Wordsworth’s account of the “growth” of his mind in language “can only ever be the history” that is formed by language itself—and Wordsworth knows this. Wordsworth’s textual development of an identity for himself is “threatened,” to use de Man’s words, “not by a historical process of becoming that acts on it from without, but from within the very process of becoming . . . by reason of the increasing difficulty of accomplishing the movement it assigns itself” (1989: 65). Similarly, Bennett talks about this “very process

³ Wordsworth remarks that “If words be not . . . an incarnation of the thought but only a clothing for it, then surely they will prove an ill gift; such a one as those poisoned vestment. . . . Language . . . is a counter-spirit” (1974: 84-85).

of becoming”: “the work of writing *itself* reveals the ungrounded constitution, the discomposure, of the writing subject, since it is precisely in writing that the noncoincidence that constitutes subjectivity is revealed or ‘experienced’” (2007: 152). But we might add here that Wordsworth himself attempts to “assign” his writing a “movement” that leads directly from “the sweet promise of the past” to his present identity-formation in order to form “an imaginative confrontation between self and self-as-other” (Wlecke, 1973: 40). De Man’s and Bennett’s reading make Wordsworth too passive. In Wordsworth’s writing, “the noncoincidence that constitutes subjectivity” is not so much “experienced” as being created. In the act of writing, this “imaginative confrontation” is gradually set apart by Wordsworth’s own increasing awareness of “the persistent indetermination that is historical temporality” (de Man, 1989: 66-67). It is Wordsworth’s intense consciousness of time that leads to “the persistent indetermination” of temporality in his autobiographical writing, in which any “narrative” is truly a “metaphor” for “the moment” (1979b: 68). “Narrative” can never coincide with “the moment,” and Wordsworth’s descriptions of his past experiences are merely “metaphor[s]” for these previous moments. The real problem for Wordsworth is that he is all too aware of this fact—as he himself puts it, all his words are merely “representatives of all our past feelings” (W. Wordsworth, 2001: 651).

Two critics, Andrew Bennett and Sally Bushell, devote substantial discussions to Wordsworth’s perplexing view of writing. Bushell points out that “the spontaneous ideal is bound up with orality;” and this leads to Wordsworth’s “double consciousness” of “the self-division of language as spoken and written discourse” (2009: 101). Similarly, Bennett states that “poetry displaces apparent immediacy (the immediacy of speech) in favor of a deferral and delay that can be identified with writing”; he goes on to suggest that “it is precisely Wordsworth’s resistance to this conception of poetry as written—a resistance complicated by his

fascination with . . . the act and process of writing itself, and by the simple fact of writing, by his seemingly endless acts of writing—that productively skews his own poetry” (2007: 4-5). On this “act and process of writing,” Bushell also remarks that the “various elements of [Wordsworth’s] own compositional method take part in a process of ‘misremembrance’ which distorts the ‘truth’ to a greater or lesser degree” (2005: 417). These statements add to de Man’s account of “language of tropes” in Wordsworth’s writing a more in-depth discussion of the conflicting, but inseparable, relationship between “the immediacy of speech” and “the [degraded] supplementary nature of the poetic text” (Bennett, 2007: 108). With de Man, Bennett and Bushell in mind, I examine how Wordsworth, in his incessant “acts of writing,” both attempts a more immediate relationship with his past self through a “spoken” “discourse” *and* engages with the representation of that past self in “the deferral and delay” of a “written” text. Furthermore, I attempt to show that this process of self-composition is complicated and haunted by the fact that the past self (the original experience) remains silent and “unrepresentable.” As Bennett puts it, “Wordsworth’s writing . . . is determined and at the same time unsettled by his sense that it is precisely writing that gives worth to words” (2007: 45). The words of Wordsworth’s text are uttered by his writing—not by the voice of the past self he seeks to inscribe in his words.

We can observe Wordsworth’s different consciousnesses of the working of language in his compositional process. In the 1805 text, Wordsworth states that he is “being vers’d / In living Nature” (1991a: 180). In MS. A, the text is revised as follows:

being versed
 possessed
 In living Nature, I had there a guide
~~Which open’d frequently my eyes, else shut.~~ [MS. A, 119’]
 (1991b: 643)

knows, is actually “hidden from all search,” lying silently in the past. It is no longer “vivid” and “present.” The inaccessibility of that particular moment haunts Wordsworth to such an extent that he oscillates back and forth between “as far as memory can look back” and “now present to my memory.” The ultimate deletion of the phrase “now present to my memory” reveals Wordsworth’s consciousness that the former moments are fading away, exerting neither “deep animation” nor “fructifying influence” (which is creative rather than being merely “beneficent”). At the end, all that is left in our reading of this passage appears to be Wordsworth’s endlessly frustrated longing for the past: “at a time,” “at a time” This baffled thought about the temporal disparity existent in writing is still haunting the poem in 1850:

the sovereign Intellect
 Who through that bodily Image hath diffused,
 As might appear to the eye of fleeting Time,
 A deathless Spirit. (W. Wordsworth, 1985: 93)

The longing for “a deathless Spirit” is undermined by the phrase “as might appear to.” The idealism of immortality becomes uncertain. Here a link is built between “Verse,” “the speaking *face* of earth and heaven,” and “that *bodily* image” when Wordsworth says: “In progress through this Verse, my mind hath look’d / Upon the speaking face of earth and heaven” (1991a: 163). It is only through these “faces” of the landscape that the being of immortality can be represented and “diffused.” The idea of the “Spirit” is repeatedly counteracted by “the [bodily] eye of fleeting time.” Wordsworth’s intensifying anxiety about “fleeting time” drives him to revise the phrase “things worthy of unconquerable life” to “things that aspire to unconquerable life” (1985: 94). This change from “worthy of” to “aspire to” indicates his painful acknowledgement of mortality brought by the passing of time.

In de Man’s view, “It is . . . not *a priori* certain that literature is a reliable source of information about anything but its own

language" (1986: 11). For de Man, in the poet's attempt to re-link the present self-representation to past selves, the writing subject "contributes nothing of its own experience, sensations, sufferings, or consciousness"; "*Text*" is produced only through "the randomness of language" (1979b: 36, 270). De Man views "the randomness of language" as "the rhetorical basis of language," which forms "a dialectical subversion of the consistent link between sign and meaning that operates within grammatical patterns" (1979b: 8). This leads to Wordsworth's conflicting consciousness of his doubled selves split between speech and silence. "The meaning-content of language remains part of an open directedness" (Bushell, 2009: 55). The "link" between "sign and meaning" becomes undecidable, and thus no fixed correspondence can be made between the self-representation in writing and Wordsworth's own self.

However, my own discussion moves beyond de Man's exclusive focus on "language" *per se* to the dynamic play at work in Wordsworth's particular language, rooted, as it is, in his "fascination" with "the act and process of writing itself." I think that de Man's account very much undervalues the vital, ever-changing relationship between Wordsworth and his text, or, we might say, between self and "non-self," made manifest by the composition of *The Prelude* (de Man, 1971: 207). I want to show that the working of Wordsworth's language does not simply "deface" Wordsworth's own self, as de Man suggests ("Autobiography veils a defacement of the mind of which it is itself the cause" [1979a: 930]), but also allows at least a sense of self to be glimpsed midway between speech and silence. That is, I want to trace Wordsworth's acknowledgement and negotiation of the "counter-spirit" of language in Book V through the figures of the Arab and the Boy of Winander.

Moreover, I seek to complicate de Man's reading of Wordsworth by considering Wordsworth's "textual self" in relation to the draft materials and revisions of *The Prelude*, which

de Man ignores. I want to examine how Wordsworth develops his sense of self not only at particular stages of writing but also during his incessant revision and reworking. While focusing to a large extent on the internal dynamics of the 1805 version of the poem, partly because it is in this version of *The Prelude* that Wordsworth most prominently makes this engagement with time, language, and their relationship a central thematic concern in the poem, and partly in order to demonstrate just how early in the composition of the poem this engagement became one of the dominant themes,⁴ the article also looks at the 1799 and 1850 texts of *The Prelude* and engages with Wordsworth's manuscripts at other stages of his writing of the poem. In reading Wordsworth, we should devote more attention to his "acts on the page and changes to the language already written there" (Bushell, 2009: 55). Through these "acts" and "changes," "the manuscripts" "reveal the poet writing down . . . in a complex and multilayered act that includes what we might call mental composition as just one element in the process" (Bennett, 2007: 12). This notion of "mental composition" adds considerable significance to "the value of 'a compositional method'" in *The Prelude* (Bushell, 2009: 68). Here we depart from de Man's rhetorical reading of Wordsworth's language, attempting a more thorough investigation of the way in which Wordsworth develops his textual self through, and attempts to write his complicated emotions into, the whole process of composition.

Jacobus calls Wordsworth's desire for a "salvation" of, and reconnection to, his past self a "Romantic fallacy of spontaneous lyric utterance" because the textual "I" is always expressed through the "counter-spirit" of language (1989: 135). Language is essentially atemporal. What this reading misses is Wordsworth's profound awareness of, and engagement with, this counteracting power of language. Here, I am indebted to Jacobus' idea that "the

⁴ Stephen Gill points out that the 1805 text is "formally much more ambitious than the versions in two or five books, but more important, it is successfully ambitious" (2006: 19).

self is not to be written out so easily, remaining obstinately lodged in the inter-text, midway between life and books. What results is less a web of meaning than an enmeshing of absences" (Jacobus, 1979: 621). The "enmeshing of absences" results from "the troubling status" when Jacobus later remarks that "Books . . . [creates] an inter-space between past and present which bridges the gulf between the divided consciousness of the adult"; "what does seem worth exploring is the troubling status of both books and writing in a poem which enlists them to 'enshrine the spirit of the past / For future restoration'" (640). In Jacobus' view, the status of the self to be represented in writing is precarious as this self is "lodged" in the "inter-text," tenaciously refraining from being "written out." This very "inter-text" is the "inter-space between past and present" where the self not only "lodge[s]" but is also "enmesh[ed]" in the grasp of language that threatens to annihilate its presence in the text. However, my discussion focuses on the positive aspect of this "inter-text." In other words, I explore the "web of meaning" through which Wordsworth attempts to accommodate a sense of his self in the "troubling" act of self-representation. Similarly, while de Man is concerned about the damage and "defacement" of "the mind" that is caused by the working of language, I want to say that Wordsworth transforms the failure of representation in his writing into an opportunity for the working of language itself. By intricately situating his self midway between speech and silence, Wordsworth is able to get a sense of self into language. This claim rests on Wordsworth's obscuration of the extent of metaphorical representation involved in his inconsistent, contradictory, and opaque assertions about language. Though de Man sees in Wordsworth's writing an "authentically temporal predicament" and a desperate "defensive strategy that tries to hide from this negative self-knowledge" the poet actually does not seek to hide from, or even to overcome, this "negative" knowledge, but to engage with both that knowledge and temporality itself (1971: 208). Wordsworth's particular

language does not simply “deface” his own self, but also develops a productive sense of self oscillating between past and present, and between speech and silence. This sense of self allows us a clearer insight into Wordsworth’s selfhood than does either de Man or Jacobus.

III. Between Speech and Silence

In Book V, Wordsworth presents his longing for an “immortal Verse” (1991a: 166) and the desire for his “salvation” of self in writing through the dream of the Arab. Wordsworth expresses this “haunting” of life with the idea of mortality. In this dream, Wordsworth’s friend comes across an Arab who is eager to bury his “twofold treasure” (165)—“a Stone” and “a Shell” (164). These both, “to give it in the language of the Dream” (164), are believed to be “Books” (165). Here, Wordsworth devotes more description to the Book of the Shell, claiming that it is “of a surpassing brightness” and “something of more worth” (164). Wordsworth’s friend hears from the shell

an unknown Tongue,
Which yet I understood, articulate sounds,
A loud, prophetic blast of harmony,
An Ode, in passion utter’d, which foretold
Destruction to the Children of the Earth,
By deluge now at hand. (165)

Wordsworth does not point out what the Book of the Shell is, but it can be inferred that the shell refers to the book of poetry, as it is that upon which his friend ponders. Moreover, Wordsworth says that the voice from the shell is a “song,” “an Ode, in passion utter’d” (1991a: 165), which corresponds to Wordsworth’s own “philosophic Song.” The shell, unlike the unchanging and fixed geometric formulae (represented through the Book of Stone, “Euclid’s Elements” [164]), is about organic life, “growth,” in time.

However, when the dreamer “hold[s] [the Shell] to [his] ear” (165), he finds that the voice from the shell is, curiously, in “an unknown Tongue.” The “Tongue” is “unknown” but not unknowable, as Wordsworth says “yet I understand, articulate sounds” (165). The Book of the Shell speaks a language (“Tongue”) that is both “unknown” and “articulate.”

Bennett suggests that “it is in the gap between an ideal of poetry as a form of speech on the one hand and the notion that speech involves a ‘sad incompetence,’ a fundamental, undeniable inadequacy of language to thought or conception or emotion on the other hand, that writing may be said to emerge in Wordsworth’s poetics” (2007: 4-5). We can see in the above quoted passage Wordsworth’s ambiguous engagement with “the immediacy of speech” and “the ‘other’ of speech”—writing (5). On the one hand, the poet aspires to a spoken discourse that is “in passion utter’d” and “flow[ing] [his] thoughts / In a pure stream of words fresh from the heart” (W. Wordsworth, 1985: 172). The idea of “flow[ing] thoughts” is intended to make up the “inadequacy of language” to enable “a pure stream of words” to present whatever is to be represented as “fresh from the hear.” He uses a series of words to signify “a form of speech” (which is heard rather than being read)—“hear,” “articulate sounds,” “uttered,”⁵ and “foretold.” At the same time, in contrast, this “Tongue” being heard is also described as written words because the “Tongue” is expressed through the Book of the Shell. The voice from the Shell, though “in passion utter’d,” assumes its “sad incompetence,” “inadequacy,” to articulate the “passion.” However, intriguingly, Wordsworth simultaneously makes the “unknown” knowable as “articulate sounds” as if “creativity is somehow occurring outside the words in which it is uttered” (Bushell, 2009: 101)—as if there is “a pure stream of words” flowing “fresh from the heart” rather

⁵ See *Oxford English Dictionary*’s definition of “utter”; utter² *verb*: make (a sound) with one’s voice.

than seeking to inscribe that heart in writing.

The listener hears an “unknown” language made up of “articulate sounds.” What the listener hears and reads is actually a “Tongue” that is “articulate” and verbalized. It is “speech” itself—the speech that registers a “sad incompetence” of language. Once “articulate[d],” the “Tongue” is fragmented into multiplied “sounds.” The “sounds” from the seashell are “articulat[ing]” and “fore[telling]” forthcoming “destruction,” “which . . . I understand,” as Wordsworth says. In this sense, the “Tongue” is knowable. There is a “deluge” bursting forth along with “a loud, prophetic blast,” which brings “destruction to the Children of the Earth” (W. Wordsworth, 1991a: 165). J. Hillis Miller says: “The forms of articulated speech or melody make the unworded blast of the original word available by turning it into definite tones or speech, and at the same time they limit it, transform it, obscure it, veil it over, traduce it by translating it” (1971: 302). In this respect, Forest Pyle points out that “the deluge issues not from nature but from *myth*; it is a deluge that exists only ‘as it is writing,’ as it is inscribed in the voices of the shell” (1995: 81). The multiplied “sounds” from the shell have already “deface[d]” and transfigured “the original word”—“pure Word” (W. Wordsworth, 1985: 99)—which is actually “unworded.” Then, mysteriously, they “translat[e]” and “traduce” “the original word” with a “blast” that prophecies the coming of “deluge.” Wordsworth claims that “the Mind of man / is fram’d even like the breath / And harmony of music.” Yet once “the Mind” is inscribed in writing, it is overwhelmed by “a loud prophetic blast” from language. This “blast” not only subverts the idea of “harmony” but also “fore[tells] / Destruction” to Wordsworth’s self-representation “by deluge now at hand.” His sense of identity is endangered once the “articulate sounds” from the Book of the Shell predicts the vanishing of his self into the “deluge” that “exists only ‘as it is writing.’”

The image of a “deluge” is a metaphor for language, which comes with the “originating death” of “the original word.” It is

also symbolic of destruction that threatens to annihilate whatever the Arab—and the writing poet—desperately seek to preserve.⁶ Moreover, the deluge stands for the imagination embedded in “the language of the Dream” that substitutes for whatever is inscribed in writing. For example, the Stone and the Shell, the “twofold treasure” of the Arab, are believed to be books. The subtle relationship between faith and fancy can be noted in one manuscript of Book V:

believed
 he {e he
~~he fancied that~~ ^ himself
 Was sitting there in the wide wilderness. [MS. A, 93^r]
 (W. Wordsworth, 1991b: 603)

Replacing the word “fancied” with the word “believed,” Wordsworth also particularly deletes the phrase “strange as it may seem” in this stage of revision (“~~strange as it may seem~~” [MS. A, 95^r]) (1991b: 606) to enforce his belief. In the 1805 text, the dreamer, in the world of imagination, has “a perfect faith in all that pass’d” (1991a: 165). This belief is further enhanced in the 1850 text due to Wordsworth’s growing fear of the representative power of language; as he puts it, in “the world of Sleep,” the dreamer “hath such strong entrancement overcome” that he “believes” everything he “fancies” (1985: 97).

Wordsworth’s writing of the Arab’s eagerness to bury his

⁶ The word “deluge” is fundamentally allusive. The “loud” “blast” of “deluge” is also associated with the flood in the biblical myth of Noah’s ark, which unleashes catastrophic but renovative power of change, and this power also indicates the political “noise and discord” of the French Revolution that dismayed the poet’s vision. Amid the dreadful “awe” of the Revolution, Wordsworth seems to envisage something promising in revolutionary “chastisement,” which has a power similar to nature’s power of admonitions (1991a: 278). It is particularly noticeable that the poet builds a link between “worst tempests” in “the midst terrible events” and “the wild blasts of music”—a connection between the Revolution and nature in Book X (278).

treasures is, as Jacobus points out, “just this precariousness, this anxious relation between . . . writing and salvation”—“Will I be saved if I write? Will my writing survive? . . . all writing expresses a demand that can never be satisfied” (1979: 624). The Arab dream symbolically conveys Wordsworth’s experience of seeking “salvation” of self in his act of self-composition. The result of this quest remains unclear because the dreamer wakes up precisely at the moment when the “deluge” is “at hand,” threatening to devour everything. To use Pyle’s words, “the prophesy [of death] goes unfulfilled, frozen in the dream at the very moment of its realization” (1995: 81). This holding back from devastating the things Wordsworth attempts to protect can be interpreted as his negotiation with the deadening effect of language. The shell that the Arab endeavours to save is intimately connected to the dreamer’s endangered identity. Wordsworth’s longing for “unconquerable life” for his self in writing is incessantly counteracted by the “loud” “blast” from writing itself.

Wordsworth also presents the relation between voice and silence through “the Boy of Winander” episode. This relation is situated in a moment of hanging, when the boy loses a stable sense of his own identity, and that looks forward only to the death of the boy. The Boy of Winander, with his hands and mouth, “as through an instrument,” blows to “mimic hootings to the silent owls” (W. Wordsworth, 1991a: 171). With the following sentence, “that they might answer him” (172), the owls, “responsive to his call,” start to “shout”

Across the watry Vale, and shout again,
 . . . with quivering peals,
 And long haloos, and screams, and echoes loud
 Redoubled and redoubled; concourse wild
 Of mirth and jocund din! (172)

These sounds from the owls are “echo[ing]” their own “haloos” and “screams.” Wordsworth is here presenting “a relationship of

mutuality” (Fry, 2008: 131) between himself and the owls. The interplay of “mimic hootings,” “long haloos,” and “echoes loud,” constitutes a harmonious interaction. As it seems, the echoes from the owls are “responsive” “echoes” of something more than the boy’s own voice. When the owls “shout again” “across the watery Vale,” the “echoes” are “redoubled and redoubled,” infinitely repeating the previous echo, and the echo that is heard even earlier. The voices of the boy and the owls have been multiplied and fragmented, again and again, into “concourse wild” through the owls’ shouting. This redoubling of voices is identified with Wordsworth’s act of writing, which, in its “supplementary nature,” reiterates, doubles, and replaces, any spoken discourse and original unrepresentable experience. The boy’s voice and the echoes from the owls are, as Timothy Bahti points out, “the conceptual pairs of fragment and totality, poem and meaning” (1981: 1046). Wordsworth’s writing of his previous harmonious relationship with nature (projected onto that of the Boy of Winander) is to “*mirror* a missing totality,” which means that “the totality is inverted into a fragment”; “the fragmented mirror-images ‘each mis-shape the other’” (1046). Echoing the voice of his earlier self, Wordsworth’s writing “*mirror[s]*” rather than literally articulating the “totality” of his past selves. His recalling of the past “mis-shape[s],” disfigures, and fragmentizes whatever is to be represented. The echoes from the owls were “concourse wild.” Shouting, “echoes,” “haloos,” and “screams” are all in an interplay of incessant commotion and “din.” This interplay of voices is “always doubling of self, and more often a multiplication or alienation” (Jacobus, 1986: 152). As we can see, Wordsworth ambiguously uses the words “mirth” and “jocund” in writing about these “redoubled” voices. This contradiction between “mirth” and “din” is written into the “concourse” of the owls, forming a further fragmentation of the “concourse” and enforces a sense of “alienation” in the poet’s relationship with his self-representation.

Following the noisy and loud compound of “echoes,” “pauses

of deep silence” start to encompass the whole scene. As Wordsworth describes it,

when it chanced
 That pauses of deep silence mock'd his skill,
 Then sometimes, in that silence, while he hung
 Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprize
 Has carried far into his heart the voice
 Of mountain torrents, or the visible scene
 Would enter unawares into his mind
 With all its solemn imagery, its rocks,
 Its woods, and that uncertain Heaven, receiv'd
 Into the bosom of the steady Lake. (1991a: 172)

The “concourse wild” falls into silence along with the earlier voice from the boy. Intermissions of “deep silence” emerge to exert its power. The voices have all faded into silence while the boy is looking for new echoes responding to his own voice. As Wordsworth depicts it, earlier, there are “echoes loud / Redoubled and redoubled.” Then, there are “pauses of deep silence,” and “sometimes, *in* that silence, *while* he hung / Listening,” “the voice / Of mountain torrents” has been “carried far into his heart” (my italics). By writing about such “pauses of deep silence,” Wordsworth is attempting to show that, in Bennett’s words, the moment of “silence,” of the lost past, can be “experienced only in and as the loss, the difference, of writing” (2007: 168). While it is true that the moment of “silence” can be “experienced only in and as the loss, the difference, of writing,” it can be experienced as such, and to this extent, as the poet attempts to express something more through this experience of “loss.” The “silence” in Wordsworth’s writing is not used to “confine proliferation when singleness split into uncontrolled redoubling” (Jacobus, 1989: 129) but to show that the fact of the past, and the fact of its being past, can still be communicated, even if the past in itself cannot. However, while Bennett asserts that the “loss of Wordsworth’s autobiographical poems may be conceived of as a loss of—a loss

constituted by—writing” (2007: 174), my own reading suggests that Wordsworth uses precisely this sense of loss inherent to all writing to communicate a self that exists in constantly changing relationships with a range of “external stimuli,” including language. For Wordsworth, our relationship with externality is constituted by exactly that “noncoincidence that constitutes subjectivity” in writing, so that writing, paradoxically, can and does represent self, though not through description (152). My discussion explores the interpretative possibilities opened up by this claim by investigating how the poet’s self-formation resists but also acknowledges and to some extent embraces the “noncoincidence” of his own sense of self and the self inscribed in language. Wordsworth attempts to retain his childhood bond with nature through an interpretation of “the loss, the difference, of writing” that uncovers that fostering in his very awareness of “two consciousnesses.”

In the “pauses of deep silence,” the boy “hung / Listening.” This act of hanging is symbolic of the suspension between voice and silence in Book V, which reveals an unstable sense of self in Wordsworth’s loss of his earlier intimate relationship with nature. Wordsworth revises “pauses of deep silence” to “a lengthened pause / Of silence” in the 1850 version (1985: 104). This stress on the prolonged pause intensifies the sense of unsteadiness, which seemingly baffles the desire for a reconnection with nature. “Listening,” the boy does hear a voice, but this is the voice from “mountain torrents” rather than from the owls. An immanent power is at work “in” the “deep” and “lengthened” “silence,” and now it comes out with overwhelming “torrents” that intruded their “voice” “*far into* [the boy’s] heart” (my italics).

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

At the moment when the analogical correspondence with nature no longer asserts itself, we discover that the earth

under our feet is not the stable base in which we can believe ourselves to be anchored. It is as if the solidity of earth were suddenly pulled away from under our feet and that we were left “hanging” from the sky instead of standing on the ground. (1987: 7)

“Hanging,” the boy’s “correspondence with nature” is destabilized while the “concourse” of the owls falls into silence. He can find neither “stable base” to set his feet on nor “anchor” with which to secure himself. This experience, for de Man, “hits as a sudden feeling of dizziness, a falling or a threat of falling, a vertigo of which there are many examples in Wordsworth” (1984: 89). But de Man’s reading is partial. As Wordsworth makes clear in the *Boy of Winander* passage, the feeling of “dizziness” and even of “falling” is further strengthened by the intrusion of powers external to his mind when “the voice / Of mountain torrents” is “carried *far into* his heart” and “the visible scene” “enter[s] unawares *into* his mind” (my italics). De Man is only partly right in saying that, at this moment of hanging, there is “a movement of [the boy’s] consciousness . . . into a world in which our mind knows itself to be in an endlessly precarious state of suspension: above an earth, the stability of which it cannot participate it, and beneath a heaven that has rejected it” (54). There is, of course, an outward movement of the boy’s consciousness as he attends to the sounds around him. But his consciousness is then overwhelmed by the nightmarish intrusion of the external world that “enter[s]” him. The movement of the boy’s consciousness symbolically expresses the way Wordsworth claims to retain his sense of a bond with nature through an interpretation of his experience of selfhood that uncovers a fostering in his present awareness of “two consciousnesses.” Here, we can observe how he writes his complicated emotions into the process of composition; using language’s agency to represent his childhood correspondence with nature, Wordsworth nevertheless represents a self overwhelmed and defaced by the “loud” “blast” from writing itself.

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

The mature poet, certainly, cannot look in an unmediated, unshadowed way at childhood experience. The medium is *human time*, at once mortifying and bonding, in short, traumatic; but it might also be identified with *nature, history or language* . . . the medium enables knowledge while deflecting a more direct—traumatic or apocalyptic—vision that is always incipient. (2005: 37)

My own discussion of this episode focuses on “language” as the “medium” through which Wordsworth attempts to reach a direct communion with his earlier self. Ambiguously, this “medium” “enables knowledge,” while the “knowledge” thus gained changes and “deflect[s]” its object. As Wordsworth says, the boy's destabilized sense of identity is a kind of “knowledge” that is “purchas'd with the loss of power!” (1991a: 173). By autobiographically writing a self that views his past self from a distance—through the “transparent veil” of words (177)—Wordsworth comes to a confrontation with a sense of self, a voiceless self. Here, de Man is helpful on Hartman's word “deflection,” defining it as “any slight bias of even unintended error;” “deflection is then conceived as a dialectical subversion of the consistent link between sign and meaning that operates within grammatical patterns,” and this leads to Wordsworth's conflicting consciousness of his doubled selves split between speech and silence (1979b: 8). The “link” between “sign and meaning” becomes undecidable; thus no fixed correspondence can be made between the self-representation in writing and Wordsworth's own self. The textual “I” produced to represent this self is “reborn out of the grave of childhood identity” but turns “past experiences into a text” (Nichols, 1992: 75-76). For Ashton Nichols, “This new grave”—“words on a page”—“is still able to reflect the past, just like the mirroring waters of a still silent lake” (76), but, as the Boy

in "Verse." At the same time, "a torrent," echoing "the voice / Of mountain torrents" in the Boy of Winander passage, usurps his exalted emotion when it is compared to his glad "uproar." The "torrent" coming from "a bursting cloud" is symbolically related to the "blast" from language. Wordsworth here makes a complex and problematic interaction between his "glad preamble," "this Verse," and an external "torrent." In doing this, he implicitly expresses his fear that his own voice may be suspended and consumed by the "torrent," which prefigures the embodiment of this voice in "the speaking face" of nature and eventually in "this Verse." As we can see in Book I of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth refrains from using any word indicating "Verse" when he talks about his "preamble" to the development of a poetic identity for his self: "My own voice chear'd me, and, far more, the mind's / Internal echo of the imperfect sounds; / To both I listen'd, drawing from them both / A chearful confidence in things to come" (1991a: 108). Only "my own voice" and the "internal echo" of the "mind" constitute this "glad preamble," to which Wordsworth "listen'd" or "sang / Aloud" (instead of writing).

Between voice and silence, there is a clear anticipation of coming death. The echo from the past self keeps disturbing Wordsworth's writing like a phantom, predicting the forthcoming vanishing of self into language. As David P. Haney remarks, writing is involved in "the temporality of a very human language whose meaning is in turn grounded in . . . death" (1990: 540), and Wordsworth is very conscious of this as he writes: the boy "h[a]ng[s] / Listening" and loses the former correspondent bond with nature and with his own identity, which is "a prefiguration of his death" (de Man, 1987: 8), and, ultimately, he is "taken from his Mates, and die[s]" (W. Wordsworth, 1991a: 172). This death of Wordsworth's self-representation, again, testifies to his failed quest for the salvation of his own self in autobiographical writing. And Wordsworth says that he "oftentimes / A full half-hour together" stands "mute—looking at the Grave in which he lies" (172).

By autobiographically writing a self that views his past self from a distance, Wordsworth comes to a confrontation with a sense of self. An implicit link with the Arab is forged when Wordsworth remarks that he “ha[s] felt / A reverence for a Being thus employ’d” to save the things his “heart holds dear” (1991a: 166). He projects his self upon the Arab, saying that “I, methinks, / *Could share* that Maniac’s anxiousness, could go / Upon *like* errand” (166, my italics). Wordsworth also problematizes his relationship to the dreamer in the Arab dream. In the 1805 version of *The Prelude*, the dreamer is said to be his friend,⁷ but in the 1850 manuscript the dream is written in the first person, as if spoken by the poet himself. In addition, the poet, “looking at” the boy’s “grave,” is actually reading the epitaph of a self that is already dead in the far past. “In an early manuscript version of [the passage] Wordsworth uses the first-person pronoun” (W. Wordsworth, 2012: 381, note 8). This manuscript is MS. JJ, a loosely connected sequence of blocks of writing composed in the winter of 1798-99 that looks ahead to the “Two Part *Prelude*.” In this early draft of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth is the Boy who hangs midway between speech and silence. However, in his later act of rewriting, Wordsworth skillfully locates his real self at a distance from his fiction—indeed from his own words—thereby attempting to save at least something of himself from the mortality brought by language: he is not the Arab, even if he cannot say what he is. He is also the one who stands “mute,” looking at the Boy’s grave. Wordsworth’s writing suggests that a rich and productive sense of ambiguity is created by an identification with, but intentional distinction from, these fictional others. In this sense, an identification with his “unrepresentable” past self is still possible

⁷ It is suggested that Wordsworth did have a friend who may have told him of such a dream. This idea comes from David Chandler’s “Robert Southey and *The Prelude*’s Arab Dream” (2003). But some critics also interpret the dream as that of Wordsworth’s. For instance, J. Robert Barth points out that “the Dream of the Arab . . . is here presented as the poet’s dream” (2003: 31).

because the writing poet withdraws that self from the overwhelming power of language by locating it instead in the silence left by “life.”

The ambiguous and perplexing relationship between the self and the other is revealing in Wordsworth's textual representations of his mind. For example, Wordsworth's manuscript reveals his struggle with language in describing his thought after beholding the view on Snowdon:

forth
~~From her mysterious fount [?within] me rose~~
 A Meditation which & appeared
 - then [? reviewed]
 To [?me] I [? reviewed]
 The spectacle in thought and it appeared
 The embodied perfect image of a might. [bifolium, 1^r, DC
 MS. 83] (1991b: 1076)

This act of revision indicates Wordsworth's indecision of the words “appeared” and “reviewed” when he talks about “the spectacle in thought”—in his afterthought. With the word “appeared” he can present the spectacle as naturally “appear[ing] / The embodied perfect image of a might.” In contrast, with the word “reviewed,” the spectacle turns out to be mediated by “a meditation.” Wordsworth erases the words “a meditation” and decides to adopt the word “appeared” after his indecision between “~~appeared~~” and [?reviewed]. Additionally, he puts his relationship to this spectacle in doubt by such revisions as “[?within]—me” and “to [?me].” The scene appears as “the embodied perfect image of a might” rather than of “a mighty Mind” (1991a: 315). The poet keeps his self from any identical link with the spectacle and reveals his conflicting vision between the view he beholds on the spot and “the spectacle in thought.”

In the act of self-representation, Wordsworth talks about “the mystery of words.” He says that he

in measure only dealt out to himself,
 Receive[s] enduring touches of deep joy
 From the great Nature that exists in works
 Of mighty Poets. Visionary Power
 Attends upon the motions of the winds
 Embodied in the mystery of words.
 There darkness makes abode, and all the host
 Of shadowy things do work their changes there,
 As in a mansion like their proper home:—
 Even forms and substances are circumfus'd
 By that transparent veil with light divine;
 And through the turnings intricate of Verse,
 Present themselves as objects recognis'd,
 In flashes, and with a glory scarce their own. (1991a: 177)

Wordsworth receives “enduring touches of deep joy” from a “great Nature” that has its “exist[ence]” in the works of “mighty Poets.” That is, he comes into contact with a “great Nature” through the poetic verse, which gives “enduring touches of deep joy.” Wordsworth goes on to say: “Visionary Power / Attends upon the motions of the winds / Embodied in the mystery of words.” First, with an inner “corresponding mild creative breeze” (108), “an auxiliary light” in his mind, Wordsworth envisages “visionary Power.” The “Power” seemingly corresponds to the “imagination” in Book VI, “which Wordsworth calls a ‘Power’ (190), the means of apprehending the Presences in nature, of holding such intercourse” (Leyburn, 1972: 129). The imaginative “workmanship” has a “Power” that interfuses everything and brings the mind and nature into “one society.” Then, as Wordsworth puts it, this “Power” “attends upon the motions of the winds / Embodied in the mystery of words.” In this reciprocal communion between inside and outside, a sense of ambiguity emerges in Wordsworth’s writing. With the phrase, “embodied in the mystery of words,” it is unclear whether the thing getting embodied is “visionary Power,” “the motions of the winds,” or both. I want to suggest that it is both, because the “visionary Power / *Attends upon* the motions of the winds” (my italics), imaginatively cooperating and interacting

idea by investigating how Wordsworth's self-formation is developed as "a representation of [his] mind in the act of creation" (2007: 108), resisting but also acknowledging the "counter-spirit" of language.

IV. "The Mystery of Words"

In the act of writing, Wordsworth intends to catch the "presence" of "visionary Power" and "the motions of the winds," but "the mystery of words" starts to exert its power precisely at the moment of "embodi[ment]" (representation). It is surprising to note that Wordsworth uses two seemingly contradictory words ("embodied" and "mystery") at the same time. What is "embodied" in language is immediately obscured by its mysterious working, becoming "deface[d]," vague and nearly incomprehensible. In "the mystery of words," "there darkness makes abode, and all the host / Of shadowy things do work their changes there, / As in a mansion like their proper home." "Darkness" and "shadowy things" take up their residence in "words": language is the dwelling-place of "darkness" and "shadowy things." Equally, books of language, though "frail" "shrines," are where the mind of the poet "*lodge[s]*" (W. Wordsworth, 1991a: 48, my italics). This contrast between "proper home" and "frail" "lodge" shows the unstable status of the mind when it is represented in words. In "the mystery of words" "all the host / Of shadowy things *do work* their *changes* there" (my italics). These "unintended" (in Bushell's word) "changes" work on and obscure everything "embodied" in "words." Yet, as Wordsworth claims, the "works / Of mighty Poets" still give "enduring touches of deep joy" (1991a: 177).

Wordsworth thinks that a "visionary Power"—a power capable of visioning—is to be found "*in* the mystery of words" (my italics). It is this "mystery," a "mystery" created by the text, that endows words themselves with "a living spirit" (Jacobus, 1979: 620). In addition, at the moment of "embodi[ment]," "forms and

substances are also circumfus'd / By that transparent veil [of words] with light divine." My focus here is mainly on the way "darkness" affects the representation of this divine spirit in Wordsworth's writing. Jacobus refers to this interaction between "darkness" and "visionary Power" as an "anxious relation between presentation and vision" (620). She points out that "The deadening of a text already slowed by its solemn rhythms allows us, paradoxically, to endow it with a living spirit—lodged in the interstices of the web, behind the veil, as a ghostly and unrepresentable presence" (620).⁸ With "the deadening of a text," the text can be endowed with "a living spirit" and a "mystery" is created by words. This "spirit," according to Jacobus, is "lodged in the interstices of the web" woven by "the turnings intricate of Verse." Its "Power" can be felt and perceived by the imagination. However, I want to say that there is also a "living spirit," a "visionary Power," "endowed" *in* "the veil" ("embodied *in* the mystery of words") rather than working as the "unrepresentable" "spirit" "behind the veil." Moreover, it is through the "transparent veil" of words "with light divine" that the "objects" to be represented become a "presence" that can be felt. In other words, the imaginative "Power" of cosmic "workmanship" Wordsworth senses in nature, when "embodied" in words, becomes "unrepresentable" because of its existence outside of language. However, a sense of this "Power" can still be felt through the action of "shadowy things" and a "power" capable of visioning—imaginatively perceiving something unrepresentable—in the working of language.

Language has a "divine" power, its own "great Nature," that is like the power of the imagination, like the "something more deeply interfused" that runs through everything in "Tintern Abbey." But by describing language's "Power" as "visionary," as a

⁸ Jacobus analyses "the veil of poetry," saying that "As always, Wordsworth's straining of language to its limits has its own fullness; if the motions of winds can never be embodied, if the mystery of words must remain ineffable, still, the veil of poetry irradiates and makes strange the objects it obscures" (1979: 620).

“Power,” as “the great Nature” of “the works / Of mighty Poets,” Wordsworth implicitly suggests that the power to be perceived in “the motions of the winds,” the power to be perceived in the imagination, and the power to be seen in language might all be, in fact, the same “visionary Power” and “light divine.” Bushell states it can often “feel as though” Wordsworth’s creative process “depends on an internal rather than an external (textual) stimulus,” but also “as though creativity is somehow occurring outside the words in which it is uttered” (2009: 101). Building on the insight of Bushell, we might go further and suggest that, in Wordsworth’s engagement with “the mystery of words,” the “internal” is brought to operate *in relation to* “an external (textual) stimulus” (just as “the voice / Of mountain torrents” that has been “carried far into [the Boy’s] heart” by “a gentle shock of mild surprise”), and that “creativity” occurs both *inside* and *outside* “the words in which it is uttered.” “Visionary Power” is to be found in experiences beyond words *and* in the working of “a light divine” in language itself. Bennett points out that “it is in writing, only in writing, that this loss [constituted by writing] can be experienced Writing, the act of writing, is precisely the loss that it—that writing—articulates, confronts and laments” (2007: 174). But I think Wordsworth’s writing does more than this; it allows the working of words to transform and incorporate this “loss” into something more than loss. That is, Wordsworth sees in the “loss” experienced in writing a compensatory opportunity for the working of the creative “visionary” power of language itself.

Wordsworth states that:

I would stand
 Beneath some rock listening to sounds that are
 The ghostly language of the ancient earth
 Or make their dim abode in distant winds.
 Thence did I drink the visionary power.
 I deem not profitless those fleeting moods
 Of shadowy exultation. (1977: 63)

This passage, though appearing like the poet's "lament" for a lost past, establishes a subtle interconnection between "the ghostly language of the ancient earth" and Wordsworth's writing now. First, "the ghostly language of the ancient earth" is said to be made up of "sounds" that he "listen[s] to." The "sounds" here are defined as "spoken" speech rather than written words. Bennett remarks that Wordsworth's poetry "seems often to work against" "the question of poetry as writing, as written (not spoken) . . ." (2007: 103). Bushell argues that Wordsworth's poetry "either suggest[s] orality or avoid[s] representation of the written" (2009: 102). However, my reading argues that there is essentially no resistance to writing in the passage quoted here; rather, the poet attempts to make a subtle connection between the "sounds" of "the ghostly language" and "the mystery of words" in his writing. The working of "shadowy things" in words moves through the "dim abode" of past "sounds" heard in "distant winds" and also through the "shadowy exultation" brought by Wordsworth's "moods" that are transient and constantly changing. In this sense, the "distant winds" and "the visionary power" still retain a link with the same "motions of the winds" and "visionary Power" "embodied in the mystery of words" because of the agency of shadowiness that moves through them. A distinction still exists between the poet's present writing and the "ghostly" (disembodied) language of the distant past. This "ghostly language" remains in silence because "Wordsworth is writing a poetry of deliberate imprecision"; "his concern is with imminence, with the possible sublimity that will always lead on, because it will never be realized" (J. Wordsworth, 1982: 17). We might build on this insight by suggesting that Wordsworth communicates a sense of the sublimity of the ineffable. For example, the source and "abode" of "exultation" cannot be specifically named by words because they are "dim" and "shadowy." They can never be caught by writing, but the fact that their power has been felt can be recorded in writing; it is the sense and feeling of that power that Wordsworth wishes to evoke.

“A ghostly language of the ancient earth” is intimated by Wordsworth’s explicit acknowledgement of his failure to transcribe it in literal terms. His writing is simultaneously perplexed by the “ghostly [presence]” of the “literal” nature he claims to represent in writing. As mentioned, seeking a “life” that is “unconquerable,” Wordsworth turns to the “speaking face” of nature “in progress through this Verse.” If he turns to nature as a way of countering the “defacement” of self in language, his writing inflicts a similar act of violence on nature—by giving nature a “face” through “this Verse,” he obscures and disfigures nature—obscuring, even while trying to reveal, the “deathless spirit” he claims to have discovered there. Wordsworth talks about the “face” of nature in Book I as well. He says that the “common face of Nature spake to me / Rememberable things” (1991a: 123). In addition, “the changeful earth . . . on my mind had stamp’d / The faces of the moving year” (122). “Rememberable things” occur within the lapse of time, and in this sense, the “face” of nature takes on a perishable “face” like that of books—a “poor earthly casket” for the “deathless sprit” of which, according to Wordsworth, it speaks. Yet, as Jacobus suggests, “if all language is dead metaphor, then a movement towards the literal . . . may, in reminding us of that originating death, summon ghostly presences” (1979: 628). While giving nature a metaphorical “speaking face,” Wordsworth is simultaneously perplexed by the “ghostly [presence]” of the “literal” nature he claims to represent in writing, which leads to a language that is intensely inconsistent, contradictory, and ambiguous. Nature, being given a “face” in Wordsworth’s writing, is “deface[d]” and disfigured to such an extent that Wordsworth starts to doubt and question: “Why hath not the mind / Some element to stamp her image on / In nature somewhat nearer to her own?” (1991a: 163). However, while Wordsworth seeks to fix—“stamp”—an “image” of his “mind” on “nature,” his use of the words “some element” and “somewhat” reveals his hesitancy and uncertainty. Here Wordsworth is seeking an external “image”

of the mind, yet acknowledges and laments the lack of such an image. He cannot even give a clear idea of the “element,” of which he can only say it would be “somewhat” closer to the mind than anything already available. The aspects of Wordsworth’s poetic project then—the self, nature and their interaction—are only ever obscured, never revealed, by that very project.

V. Conclusion

Opening itself up to the “mystery” in “words,” Wordsworth’s writing represents that “mystery,” created by “all the host of shadowy things” to be found in language. Imaginatively representing the “presence” of things as this is *felt*, and doing this through the “visionary Power” of words, Wordsworth works with the ambiguous play of language (which both empowers his “inner eye” [1991a: 173] with its creative power and threatens his desire for the preservation of past selves with its inherent “defacing” nature) in his poem. “Through the turnings intricate of Verse,” the things in Wordsworth’s thoughts are folded back into “the mystery of words”—in ways that allow thoughts to be recognized “in *flashes*” even if their “glory” is “*scarce* their own” (my italics). The objects, seen through “the mystery of words,” lose their identity. However, these objects are still “recognis’d” rather than being totally “deface[d].” With the words, “transparent,” “flashes,” and “scarce,” Wordsworth holds back the things he tries to present from vanishing completely into language, signaling their “presence” beyond the representation of them, gesturing from within writing to their “unrepresentable” essence outside of writing. To keep “objects” between speech and silence, his writing obscures the representation of them in order to create a feeling that they are evoked but never caught by writing. For example, Wordsworth is intentionally vague about the things represented with such words as “forms and substances” and “objects.” In this way, he protects the “unrepresentable” things from being named and “defaced” by

words, while creating a sense of their presence in his writing. Wordsworth's words are metaphorical, giving "objects" "a glory scarce their own." Now the "weakness" of words is transformed into the "mystery" of words, as Wordsworth finds ways of both strategically protecting things from being "deface[d]" in language and, at the same time, getting at least the fact of their presence into language through inference.

Wordsworth regains his faith in language by claiming to uncover a "visionary Power" in the mysterious working of words, through which the poet can make the things he desires to represent in writing *half-present*. For example, Wordsworth talks about inexplicable, "unknown modes of being" after the stolen boat episode. In this episode, Wordsworth, as a child, had a sense of guilt because of his desire to steal the boat. While he was rowing the boat on the lake bathed in moonlight, he was delighted, but was also concerned that nature might snatch him and punish his behavior. As he describes it, "the huge Cliff / Rose up between [him] and the stars, and still, / With measur'd motion, like a living thing, / Strode after" him (1991a: 117). After the spectacle of that night Wordsworth's "brain / Work'd with a dim and undetermin'd sense / Of unknown modes of being" (117). His "sense" of "the unknown" is "dim and undetermin'd," and "there was a darkness" (117) in his thoughts. The word "darkness" is especially notable here. By talking about "a darkness" in his thought, Wordsworth suggests that this "darkness" is like the "darkness" at work in language. That is, he implies that the same kind of "darkness" "mov[es] slowly *through*" his "mind" and through language (117, my italics). In the action of "mov[ing]," the same "darkness" is passing through both language and the mind, which gives this "darkness" agency to create a "presence" of his "mind" in his writing. Equally, the "*shadowy* things" in "the mystery of words" echoes the "*dim[ness]*" of "unknown modes of being" (my italics) "sense[d]" by consciousness. "Mysterious," "shadowy" "darkness" links Wordsworth's writing and his sense of the being.

At the same time, the poet's mind and the "unknown modes of being" it "sense[s]" remain outside the reach of words. Wordsworth's vague phrases—"call it solitude, / Or blank desertion," "no familiar shapes," and "huge and mighty Forms" (1991a: 117)—hint at the existence of "unknown modes of being," and at the "mind" sensing them, but also acknowledge the impossibility of catching their existence, which remains outside of language. Yet Wordsworth's vagueness is also a way of not putting things too precisely into language in order to protect them from language's overwhelming power. For Wordsworth, the "veil" of words is "transparent," but makes things recognizable only "in flashes." For example, though he exclaims, "O Heavens! how awful is the might of Souls / And what they do within themselves," he also says that "I wish'd to touch [this 'heroic argument'] / With hand however weak; but in the main / It lies far hidden from the reach of words" (139-140). Wordsworth glorifies the "might" and working of "Souls" in writing; nevertheless, he also points out that "*in the main / It lies far hidden from the reach of words*" (my italics). His use of words here shows the difficulty of "reach[ing]" the "awful" "might" of "Souls" with words, but also indicates some possibility of accessing its existence because it is not entirely separated from "the reach of words." The Soul can be glimpsed through the "transparent veil" of words, but only as a glimmering, unsubstantial, indefinable "something," hanging between speech and silence.

Working with, rather than against, "the mystery of words," Wordsworth "communicates precisely by stressing the incommunicable nature of what he wishes to present" (O'Neill, 1996). On the issue of this "incommunicable nature," Mary R. Wedd remarks that "There is no word for what he wants to say . . . so he employs the rhetoric of the mystics to describe the monistic sense of oneness, contentment, and stillness that accompanies the collapse of the boundary between the terrestrial and the celestial" (as cited in Moores, 2006: 122). It is exactly this "collapse of the boundary"

to delete it due to his ever present sense of uncertainty about this word. All of the key words quoted here, such as “explain,” “unfold,” “communed with,” “speak out,” and “pour out,” are “similarly employed as verbs that are concerned with communication but place emphasis on the *purpose* of an action rather than on its means” (Bushell, 2009: 103). As Bushell puts it, to explore the way Wordsworth engages with language for “the *purpose*” of communication, it is useful to “consider Wordsworth’s ‘compositional contradictions’ at both a represented level in the completed work as well as in the underlying drafts” (2009: 100). This “compositional contradiction” surfaces in Wordsworth’s conflicting views of words as “a passion and a power” in “tuneful order” (1985: 108) and as “a counter-spirit” to, and “a blast of,” “harmony.”

Writing his self into the poem, Wordsworth is, as he has made clear in Book I of *The Prelude*, “shap[ing] out / Some Tale from [his] own heart” (1991a: 112). This is a “Tale” which, he hopes, represents his “own heart.” But his writing posits the “heart” midway between speech and silence by saying that this “Tale” is described as “more near akin” (rather than completely identical) to his “own passions and habitual thoughts” (112). Wordsworth’s “passions” and “thoughts” turn out to be a “half-absence” in the “Tale” through this opaque representation of them. Wordsworth elaborates on a subtle parallel between his verse and his own “heart” by bringing them both “more near” to each other, but simultaneously ensuring that they remain merely “akin.” The “heart” is therefore made “half” present by Wordsworth’s constant advertising of the fact that his language has not actually caught it.

Wordsworth knows that he is never able to reach the past, even through autobiographical writing. This knowledge haunts, compels, and drives the whole of the poem. However, this disappearance of the self in language through the replacement of its “face” by words offers an opportunity too: the poet comes to

realize that a new self can be developed in the act of writing. A new textual “I” is invented and formulated during the process of composition, in which Wordsworth endeavors to “hallow” and glorify a textual self. Wordsworth says:

It seemeth, in behalf of these, the works,
 And of the Men who fram'd them, whether known,
 Of sleeping nameless in their scatter'd graves,
 That I should here assert their rights, attest
 Their honours; and should, once for all, pronounce
 Their benediction; speak of them as Powers
 Forever to be hallow'd. (1991a: 167)

These men in the past (as well as his past self) are either “known” or “sleeping nameless” in “their scatter'd graves,” and the writing Wordsworth, through the textual “I,” thinks that he—“in behalf of [the Men]”—“should” demonstrate “their honours” and even “speak of them as Powers.” Wordsworth is assigning himself a new poetic responsibility here—to “[hallow]” these men and their works like “the spirit” “hallowing” “the works / Of Grecian Arts, and purest Poesy” (173). It is Wordsworth’s building of a different poetic identity for himself, in the full consciousness of the disparity between speech and silence, that leads into the apocalyptic play of the imagination in the Alps, and the sublime display of “a mighty Mind” on Mount Snowdon in *The Prelude*.

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言語與靜默之間： 文本裡所窺見的華茲沃斯自我

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摘 要

本文主題為華茲沃斯《序曲》裡第五部書中的自我呈現。我將研讀詩人對此書的修改過程中所塑造的「文本自我」，以探討其中的重要關聯，並觀察他如何將其複雜的情感寫入著作過程。華茲沃斯透過文本呈現的自我在寫作時消逝在語言本身。由於被語言的「反精神」束縛著，詩人描述出的自我呈現被文字「喧噪的闕響」淹沒、又被其替換性的比喻所磨滅。然而我主張詩人在寫作時將他所意識到的文字「弱性」轉化成語言運作中的契機。相對於 Paul de Man 與 Mary Jacobus 對華茲沃斯文字運用之否定性評論，我探討詩人對於「生命與書本」之間文字組織結構的正面運用。對詩人而言，「文字奧妙」中的「想像力量」能夠洞悉其呈現的自我之「存在感」。我將特別描述詩人如何藉文字示意自我在語言本身裡的不存在性，來傳遞語言中自我的存在性。詩人巧妙地在言語與靜默之間以文字呈現自我，認可但同時抗拒「文字奧妙」中的「黑暗」與「朦朧之物」。詩人正是經由其對於語言矛盾且晦暗的運用，得以避免其「無法呈現」的自我完全被文字抹滅。

關鍵詞：華茲沃斯、《序曲》、文字奧妙、自我呈現、語言之「反精神」