

# The Prelude: Stealing the Boat

One summer evening (led by her) I found  
 A little Boat tied to a Willow-tree  
 Within a rocky cave, its usual home.

1 Straight I unloosed her chain, and stepping in  
 Pushed from the shore. It was an act of stealth  
 And troubled pleasure, nor without the voice  
 Of mountain-echoes did my boat move on,  
 Leaving behind her still, on either side,  
 Small circles glittering idly in the moon,  
 Until they melted all into one track  
 Of sparkling light. **But now, like one who rows,  
 (Proud of his skill) to reach a chosen point  
 With an unswerving line, I fixed my view  
 Upon the summit of a craggy ridge,  
 The horizon's utmost boundary; far above  
 Was nothing but the stars and the grey sky.  
 She was an elfin Pinnace; lustily  
 I dipped my oars into the silent lake,  
 And, as I rose upon the stroke, my boat  
 Went heaving through the Water like a swan;**  
 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. With trembling oars I turned,  
 And through the silent water stole my way  
 Back to the Covert of the Willow-tree;  
**There in her mooring-place I left my Bark,—  
 And through the meadows homeward went, in grave  
 And serious mood; but after I had seen  
 That spectacle, 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.

By William Wordsworth

## GCSE POETRY: REVISION NOTES

### CONTENT

The Prelude is an autobiographical poem, capturing Wordsworth's visit to the Lake District when he was younger. It was published in 1850.

The extract tracks the journey from the narrator finding a boat, to stealing it, to taking it out on the lake and then returning home. This 'journey' takes the narrator on an emotional shift: from happy and confident, to intimidated and scared of the colossal magnitude of the mountains and nature around him.

**Wordsworth's first-person narrative poem highlights the change from innocence to experience; from childhood to adulthood; from ignorance to awareness. He explores the immensity of nature and writes with respect for the world he witnessed as a younger man.**

### LANGUAGE

- **"act of stealth"** and **"troubled pleasure"** – **noun phrases** – first indication that something isn't quite right; hints at feelings of guilt for stealing, but also excitement at doing something new
- **"a huge peak, black and huge"**– **imagery**– highlighting the size of the mountain before him; dark suggests a shift to more gloomy, apprehensive tone
- **"that spectacle, for any days, my brain worked with"**– **dark imagery** – implies that the journey to experience cannot be undone and he cannot get the images out of his mind; he has been changed forever

### STRUCTURE

**Blank verse (unrhymed)**– making the poem serious and important in its meaning

**3 layers of tone in the narrator's voice**– 1) first part is light and carefree. 2) second tone is darker when the mountain appears. 3) reflective tone at the end when the narrator thinks about how this experience affected him

**One long, unbroken stanza** – emphasising the one journey and the way the memory is still so strong in the narrator's mind