*Excerpt from* **The Prelude**

**By William Wordsworth**

And in the frosty season, when the sun

Was set, and visible for many a mile

The cottage windows through the twilight blazed,

I heeded not their summons: happy time

It was indeed for all of us – to me

It was a time of rapture. Clear and loud

The village clock tolled six, – I wheeled about,

Proud and exulting like an untired horse

That cares not for his home. All shod with steel,

We hissed along the polished ice in games

Confederate, imitative of the chase

And woodland pleasures, – the resounding horn,

The pack loud chiming, and the hunted hare.

So through the darkness and the cold we flew,

And not a voice was idle; with the din

Smitten, the precipices rang aloud;

The leafless trees and every icy crag

Tinkled like iron; while far-distant hills

Into the tumult sent an alien sound

Of melancholy not unnoticed, while the stars

Eastward were sparkling clear, and in the west

The orange sky of evening died away.

\* This is an extract from ‘The Prelude’ which is an autobiographical epic poem in blank verse (without rhyme, iambic pentameter).

\* ‘The Prelude’ is an extremely personal and revealing work of the details of Wordsworth’s life.

\* The poem was published three months after Wordsworth’s death in 1850 and titled by his widowed wife, Mary.

\* ‘The Prelude’ was the product of a lifetime – it reconciles Wordsworth’s understanding of nature with his development as a poet.

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| *This is an extract from The Prelude by William Wordsworth (1770-1850). The prelude is a very long autobiographical poem, with the alternative title ‘Growth of a Poet’s Mind’. The passage here comes from the first book of twelve. The whole poem is several hundred pages long in standard print size.* |

**William Wordsworth (1770 ~ 1850)**

\* Wordsworth describes skating on a frozen lake just as night is falling (presumably a scene from his childhood).

\* The poem depicts a childhood memory of skating with ‘friends’ (very personal, as this is reflected in the fact that the poem is written in first person, using personal pronouns such as ‘I’).

**ANNOTATIONS:**

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| ‘And in the frosty season’ |

\* ‘frosty': gives cold, white and dark connotations (ice).

The beginning here is rather unusual, as it begins with the coordinating conjunction ‘and’ which is usually used as a connective between two parts of a phrase or sentence. This shows the fact that this is a continued part of the poem, rather than a individual piece in its own right.

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| “And in the frosty season, when the sun” |

\* ‘frosty season': the season (winter) is revealed – wintry, cold (perhaps Christmas) – connotation of a childish memory.

\* ‘sun’ – connotations with heat contrasts with the coldness of the frosty season (binary opposition).

The use of the adjective ‘frosty’ sets the scene of the poem as the setting of Winter is revealed, and seems to symbolize a time of happiness, as it has wintry, Christmas-related, childish connotations that may spark childhood memories of Christmas in the readers themselves. There is juxtaposition in this line, between the idea of ‘winter’ and the image of the ‘sun’. The connotations of heat contrasts with the coldness of the frosty season creating binary opposition.

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| “Was set, and visible for many a mile” |

\* ‘was set’ – deals with the shortness of time (the days are shorter in winter), there is sibilance.

\* ‘visible for many a mile': windows of the cottage are visible from far away – emphasis on the remoteness of the house.

The enjambment across the first two lines show the fast pace of the poem, which puts emphasis on the idea that the poet is trying to get across of the shortness of happy times. Also the part of this line ‘was set’ which contains sibilance, seems to be dealing with the shortness of time, perhaps both metaphorically in a spiritual sense and literally, as days are shorter in winter. The metaphor ‘visible for many a mile’ describe that the windows of the cottage (mentioned in the next line) are visible from far away, emphasizing the remoteness of the house.

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| “The cottage windows through the twilight blazed” |

\* ‘cottage’ – depicts the rural setting of the poem.

\* ‘twilight blazed': gives a sense of transition and change (getting darker – transitioning time of day). This phrase suggests an intense heat / gleam, like the ‘sun’. Again this contrasts with the frosty season (binary opposition).

The visual imagery created here of the cottage, depicts the rural setting of the poem, with warm, cozy connotations. Also the mention of the cottage gives a sense of domestication within nature, and tells the reader that there are people involved in this poem, as opposed to perhaps Wordsworth’s other poems like ‘Daffodils’ which focuses almost all on natural scenery. This line suggest light being emitted from the house, and if so, putting in the context of his time, Wordsworth would be referring to ‘candles’ rather than electricity taking over as a light source from the sun which emphasizes the rural setting and naturalism of the poem.

The noun ‘twilight’ refers to the period of evening that takes place between daylight and darkness which creates a sense of obscurity, ambiguity or gradual decline. It shows that the day is transitioning; getting darker, and the mention of the verb ‘blazed’ suggests an intense heat or gleam, showing that perhaps the ‘twilight’ is at its most beautiful and strong moment creating beautiful imagery. This ‘change’ in the day connotes an ‘ending’ as well as perhaps a ‘beginning’. This imagery again contrasts with the idea of a ‘frosty season’, creating binary opposition.

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| “I heeded not the summons: – happy time” |

\* ‘heeded not’ – did not listen/give attention to the summons, which was (1) the sun setting (getting darker), or perhaps (2) the summons of his parents.

The next line, mentions that the poet ‘heeded not the summons’ which may either refer to the fact that he did not listen or give attentions to the calling of his parents to return home, or that perhaps he ignored the fact that the sun was setting and the day was getting darker as a cue for him to be returning home. The reason suggested for this can be found in the noun phrase ‘happy time': the poet does not want to return home and retire because he is having fun.

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| “It was, indeed, for all of us; to me” |

\* ‘was': suggests that he is looking back; reminiscing.

\* ‘us': confederates – the poet is with his friends, which contrasts to later in the poem when he reflects alone.

\* ‘me': the end focus of the line, signifies that even though he is with his friends (i.e. in a group), he distinguishes himself as alone.

The next line contains inverted syntax which puts emphasis on certainty (‘indeed’) felt by all the people referred to in the poem. The verb ‘was’ suggests that the poet is looking back or reminiscing (this is enforced by the fact that the poem is in present tense). The personal pronoun ‘us’ suggests a union, the poet and his friends. This contrasts (juxtaposes) to the personal pronoun ‘me’ which is the end focus of the line, which hints individualism in signifying that even though he is with his friends (i.e. in a group), he distinguishes himself as alone.

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| “It was a time of rapture: clear and loud” |

\* ‘rapture': sense of ecstasy perhaps with some biblical connotations – relates to intense pleasure (fun).

\* ‘clear': suggests the purity of the atmosphere.

The use of the noun ‘rapture’, suggests a sense of intense ecstasy (relating to pleasure and fun). It also has some biblical connotations, which make the use of this word more powerful. It suggests happy times and freedom. The use of the adjective ‘clear’ adds a hint of the purity of the atmosphere, and the use of the adjective ‘loud’ begins to appeal to our aural senses.

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| “The village clock tolled six; I wheeled about” |

\* ‘tolled': negative connotations

\* ‘wheeled about': ice-skating in no particular direction, symbolizing freedom and energy (youth).

This line signifies that it is time to go home for the poet, however the use of the verb ‘tolled’ may refer to the sound of a bell, or may negative connotations if the poet is referring to the fact that the time is ‘charging’ him money, or perhaps in this case ‘fun’, taking it away from him. The  illustration of a village clock further emphasizes the rural setting of the poem.

The use of the verb ‘wheeled’ about, creates an image of the poet ice-skating in no particular direction, symbolizing freedom and energy in youth, which ties into the simile in the next line of the poem. The heightened emotions may be sparked by the fact that the poet understands that it is almost time for him to leave.

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| “Proud and exulting, like an untired horse,” |

\* ‘proud and exulting': conveys a sense of power and vibrancy of himself like a galloping horse, has connotations of energy, happiness, excitement and grace-fullness.

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\* ‘like an untired horse”: a simile for youth.

The adjective ‘proud’ and the verb ‘exulting’ used conveys a sense of power and vibrancy of himself like a galloping horse, which has connotations of an energetic, powerful, majestic animal. The childish, out of control act being portrayed in this simile seems to be portraying the idea of youth and the freedom that comes along with it.

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| “That cares not for his home. – All shod with steel’ |

\* ‘cares’ ‘his’ ‘shod’ ‘steel': sibilance emphasizes the swiftness and smoothness of the motion of skating.

The first part of this line adds personification to the simile of the horse, and the sibilance here emphasizes the swiftness and smoothness of the motion of skating.

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| “We hiss’d along the polished ice, in games” |

\* ‘hiss’d” – contraction, a dynamic verb that appeals to our senses with cacophony (seems sinister).

\* ‘hiss’d’, ‘bellowing’, ‘rang aloud’ – auditory imagery, appealing to the sense of hearing.

\* ‘polished ice’ – no crops, fertility (winter).

There is contraction in the dynamic verb ‘hiss’d’, which appeals to our senses with sinister sounding cacophony. The words used in the next few lines (‘hiss’d, bellowing, rang aloud) all are auditory imagery, and appeals to our sense of hearing. The mention of the ‘polished ice’ here emphasizes that characteristics of winter, where there is no fertility and water freezes and becomes ice.

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| “Confederate, imitative of the chase” |

\* ‘confederate’ – seems superficial (in terms of human relations), but also suggests an ‘accomplice’ – i.e. working towards the same goal, joined by an agreement (presumably the game).

The use of the adjective ‘confederate’, suggests some superficiality in terms of social relations, but also suggests and ‘accomplice’ or people united by an agreement or working towards the same goal. This may be interpreted as the childish excitement of perceiving the act of playing a game, or hiding from parents as a ‘secret’ and ‘illegal’ act.

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| “And woodland pleasures, the resounding horn,” |

\* ‘resounding horn': an echo – accentuates the isolation; clarity + crispness of the air.

The ‘resounding horn’ refers to an echo, which accentuates the isolation as well as the clarity and crispness of the cold air.

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| “The Pack loud bellowing, and the hunted hare.” |

\* ‘Pack'; collective noun with connotations to wolves.

# Notes # : the last few lines portray the children pretending to hunt and although it is clear that this is a game, is seems sinister and dark.

The collective noun ‘pack’ has connotation to wolves or dogs, and there is alliteration in the phrase ‘hunted hare’. The use of the verb ‘bellowing’, suggest ‘out of control’, and seems childish. The last few lines portray the children pretending to hunt, and although it is clear that this is a game, it still seems sinister and dark, perhaps symbolic of the figurative meaning of the poem in contrast with its literal meaning.

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| “So through the darkness and the cold we flew,” |

\* ‘darkness and the cold': contextualizing the atmosphere, winter.

The adjectives ‘darkness and cold’ contextualize the atmosphere of winter. There is a focus on motion in this line with the verb ‘flew’, which has again, childish, speedy connotations, referring to the motion of ice-skating.

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| “And not a voice was idle; with the din,” |

\* ‘din’ ‘voices': appeals to our auditory senses.

The fast, continuous flow of the poem here is imitative of the content of the poem (the chase). The words ‘din’ and ‘voices’ appeal to our auditory senses, especially the word ‘din’, which refers to a lot of noise.

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| “Meanwhile, the precipices rang aloud,” |

\* ‘precipices': cliff face, dangerous connotations.

\* ‘rang aloud': appeals to auditory senses.

The adverb ‘meanwhile’ refers to when the children were having fun, and shows a direct comparison between humans and nature. The noun ‘precipices’ refers to a cliff face, and has dangerous and sinister connotations. The verb ‘rang aloud’ appeals to our auditory senses.

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| “The leafless trees, and every icy crag” |

\* ‘leafless’ – barren imagery.

\* ‘icy crag': cold imagery.

The adjective ‘leafless’ creates barren imagery, as suited to the setting of winter. The use of the determiner ‘every’ signifies precision. The noun ‘icy crag’ refers to a steep cliff.

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| “Tinkled like iron, while the distant hills” |

\* ‘tinkled like iron': a simile used to emphasize the sharpness of the sound and isolation (beautiful imagery, auditory crispness evokes the idea of bells however the usage of the word iron is rather out of place as it has hard and bare connotations).

# Note #Using words with negative connotations (coldness, isolation), to describe spectacular vision. Words, when used together, create a soft, auditory image.

The onomatopoetic simile ‘tinkled like iron’, is used to emphasize the sharpness of the sound and isolation in the scene (sounds of skates). This creates beautiful imagery, and the auditory crispness evokes the idea of bells, however the usage of the word ‘iron’ is rather out of place, as it has hard and bare connotations.

Wordsworth uses words with negative connotations (coldness, isolation), to describe this imagery, and the effect of using these particular words together creates a soft, auditory image. The noises from the skates and the boys echo in the valley, linking humans with nature. The mention of the ‘distant’ hills provide visual imagery, and suggest panning in the scenery (in –> out).

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| “Into the tumult sent an alien sound” |

\* ‘tumult': associated with loud, confused noises

\* ‘alien': connotes distance, foreign…

The word ‘tumult’ is associated with loud, confused noises, similar to ‘din’ (tautology). The word ‘alien’ connotes distance and foreignness.

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| “Of melancholy, not unnoticed, while the stars,” |

\* ‘melancholy': sadness – here, perhaps there is a wider metaphor where he looks back at childhood through this scene; aware of impermanence.

\* ‘stars': stars are coming out – death of the sun (transition) portraying a sense of sadness – suggests the nostalgia of his memories (longing for the past).

The use of the noun ‘melancholy’ connotes sadness, and perhaps here there is a wider metaphor where the poet looks back at his childhood through this event, aware of impermanence or the continuous transition of time. The mention of the ‘stars’ portray that they are coming out and nighttime has fallen – the ‘death’ of the sun, or the transition of time portrays a sense of sadness which suggests the nostalgia of the poet’s memories and his longing for the past.

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| “Eastward, were sparkling clear, and in the west” |

\* ‘Eastward, in the West': binary opposition, east and west (accentuates the theme of change and transition – the inevitable cycle of nature), the diurnal round of the Earth, as mentioned later. The layout of this line also imitates the movement of east to west.

# Note # The detail of the depiction of the sunset provides the reader with an awareness of finality (both an end and a beginning).

There is binary opposition in the next line of ‘east’ and ‘west’. This accentuates the theme of change and transition in the poem, portraying the inevitable cycle of nature. The layout of this line also imitates this opposition, or movement. The detail put into the depiction of the sunset provides the reader with an awareness of finality: both an end and a beginning.

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| “The orange sky of evening died away.” |

\* ‘Orange sky': a beautiful vision – (the sunset).

\* ‘died': a dynamic verb, (desolate), very powerful (‘dying’ as in ‘Ode to Autumn’ can be a beautiful thing).

The portrayal of the ‘orange sky’ or the sunset creates powerful, beautiful imagery. The dynamic verb ‘died’ is very powerful, but as Wordsworth has portrayed in the ‘Ode to Autumn’, death can be a beautiful thing. The tone in this part of the poem is sad and emphasizes melancholy.

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| “Not seldom from the uproar I retired” “Into a silent bay, or sportively” |

\* ‘uproar': there is a contrast, transition between the ‘silence’ in the next line.

\* ‘I retired': the poet leaves his friends, retreats to a ‘silent bay’ – solitude is necessary to achieve the transcendental appreciation of nature (daffodils). Alternatively, it could mean that the poet is old and matured.

The use of the noun ‘uproar’ contrasts and transitions between the adjective ‘silent’ in the next line. The verb ‘retired’ signifies that the poet leaves his friends and retreats into a ‘silent bay’. It is soon portrayed that solitude is necessary to achieve the transcendental appreciation of nature, like in ‘daffodils’. Alternatively, this could also mean that the poet is old and matured and has retired from his youth.

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| “Glanced sideway, leaving the tumultuous throng,” |

\* ‘glanced sideway’ – glancing sideways reminds us of the fast motion in the poem: fast motion vs. quiet stationary reflection.

The ‘glanced sideway’ in this line is reminiscent of the fast motion in the poem, which contrasts with the quiet, stationary reflection of the poet. ‘Leaving’ could signify him graduating from childhood, or the fact that he is quiting his activities for the day.

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| “To cut across the image of a star” |

\* ‘cutting across the ice': like flying (freedom and expression).

\* ‘image of a star': ice is reflecting the star (image of dancing in the stars) – heavenly atmosphere.

The act of ‘cutting across’ the ice connotes freedom and expression, in the sense that it is similar to flying. The ‘image of a star’ is depicting the stars being reflected by the ice, and connotes a heavenly atmosphere.

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| “That gleamed upon the ice: and oftentimes” |

\* ‘gleamed upon the ice': vivid imagery of purity and crystalline clarity.

The verb ‘gleamed’ creates vivid imagery of purity and crystalline clarity.

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| “When we had given our bodies to the wind” |

\* ‘given our bodies': sacrifice to nature.

This line is not grammatically correct, and the poet does not mean this literally, but expresses the idea of skating very quickly.

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| “And all the shadowy banks, on either side, Came sweeping through the darkness, spinning still” |

\* ‘shadowy banks': personified banks are moving – introduces the idea of being a part of the surroundings (almost as if he cannot see / feel himself moving) (tension).

\* ‘spinning still': contradictory, oxymoron – an image of dizziness. Poetic exploration of what is actually moving – the landscape or the poet.

The ‘shadowy banks’ are personified here to be moving. The poet introduces the idea of being ‘part’ of his naturalistic surroundings, almost as if he cannot see or feel himself moving. The oxymoron ‘spinning still’ creates an image of dizziness, and is a poetic exploration of what is actually moving (the landscape or the poet).

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| “The rapid line of motion, then at once Have I, reclining back upon my heels” |

\* ‘then at once’ – (spontaneity), also there is a caesura / pause in the comma before this, which effectively creates tension / suspense / adds to the spontaneity.

The ‘at once’ after the caesura (which effectively creates tension) suggests the spontaneity of the action.

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| “Stopp’d short, yet still the solitary cliffs,” |

\* ‘stopp’d short’ – alliteration / sibilance is used to emphasize the sharpness of the skates, and the suddenness at which he stops.

\* ‘yet’ – nature overpowers him and continues even if he stops.

The alliteration and sibilance in this like is used to emphasize the sharpness of the skates, and the suddenness at which he stops. The usage of the adverb ‘yet’ shows that even though he himself has stopped in motion, nature is overpowering and continues even when he has stopped. The detail in his flashback signifies that he was able to remember all of this in vivid detail, because it was a very dramatic and impressionable moment for him.

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| “Wheeled by me, even as if the earth had rolled” |

\* ‘wheeled by me': the poet is detached, seems like he is looking down at the earth moving round and stopping to see the moment.

The phrase ‘wheeled by me’ suggests that the poet is detached from reality – he is looking down at the earth moving, and stops his own movement to take in the moment.

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| “With visible motion her diurnal round;” |

\* ‘diurnal’ : during the day.

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| “Behind me did they stretch in solemn train” |

\* ‘solemn train': may refer to the necessity of solitude and isolation. The mountains stretch into the darkening distance – as if they metaphorically refer to memories. Also seems to have connotations of a progressing funeral.

The phrase ‘solemn train’ is very somber and serious, and may be referring to the necessity of solitude and isolation. The mountains stretch into the darkening distance – as if they metaphorically refer to memories. Alternatively, this phrase seems to have connotations of a progressing funeral.

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| “Feebler and feebler, and I stood and watched” |

\* ‘feebler and feebler': it is getting darker, and also emphasizes the passing of time (diurnal – daily), the wider metaphor is that time has faded his memories.

The repetition of the adjective ‘feebler’ illustrates that it is getting darker, and also serves to emphasize the passing of time, the wider metaphor perhaps being that time has faded his memories.

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| ‘Till all was tranquil as a dreamless sleep’ |

\* ‘dreamless sleep’ – connotations of death. The simile suggests calm and lack of movement. Wordsworth reflects on nature’s grandeur: the moment brings a sort of clarity – there is a sort of maturing that occurs. Noise is replaced by thoughtful silence (passive wiseness).

\* spiritual experience, God’s presence through nature.

The use of the word ‘tranquil’ in this line contrasts to when there was a focus on noise previously in the poem. The phrase ‘dreamless sleep’ has connotations of death, and the simile suggests calm and lack of movement.

Wordsworth seems to be reflecting on nature’s grandeur in this spiritual experience, the moment bringing a sort of clarity (maturing that occurs) and noise (childhood and youth) is replaced by thoughtful silence (adulthood).