What happens?

A youthful boating adventure becomes an unsettling encounter with nature.

The main idea

Nature overturns the young speaker’s self-assurance and remains powerful inside his imagination.

1. “an act of stealth”

Method: Moral diction

The speaker recognises secrecy and wrongdoing even before the apparently pleasurable adventure begins.

2. “Went heaving through the water like a swan;”

Method: Simile

The youthful rower imagines graceful command of the water.

3. “a huge peak, black and huge,”

Method: Repetition

Scale overwhelms the earlier graceful self-image.

4. “a trouble to my dreams.”

Method: Psychological aftermath

The event continues after physical danger has passed.

Form and structure

An autobiographical verse extract in unrhymed iambic pentameter, or blank verse.

Development, voice and tone

Taking the boat — Secretly excited. The apparent adventure begins with confidence mixed with awareness of wrongdoing.

Mountain encounter — Awed and afraid. A peak appears to pursue the rower; the landscape seems capable of independent action.

After returning — Disturbed and reflective. The adult narrator describes an enduring change in the child's thoughts and dreams.

Context

Wordsworth's Romantic writing explores the mind's relationship with nature. The extract appears in the posthumous 1850 Prelude.

Comparison links

Storm on the Island: nature overturns human security. Ozymandias: limits of power.

Recall question

Where does the speaker's sense of control begin to fail?