Wordsworth : The Prelude

( Boat Stealing Episode)

One summer evening (led by her) I found

A little Boat tied to a Willow-tree

Within a rocky cave, its usual home.

Straight I unloosed her chain, and, stepping in,

Pushed from the shore.

It was an act of stealth

And troubled pleasure, 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; for 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 a 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.