**Student Response Paper #2**

On Death During the Industrial Revolution as Represented in ‘We Are Seven’ by William Wordsworth

‘We Are Seven’ by William Wordsworth is a short poem which centers on a little girl and her steadfast claim that she is one of seven siblings despite the fact that two of them have died and are buried. It is likewise about an unnamed individual – presumably Wordsworth – and that individuals assertion that if two of the little girl’s siblings are dead, then she is only one of five siblings. The poem is a dialogue between these two characters that interestingly seems to flip the roles of adult and childhood. The child in this poem speaks easily and calmly, completely self-assured in her statements of life and death. The adult, on the other hand, speaks argumentatively and even aggressively as the poem nears its end, as if he cannot comprehend this child’s innocent viewpoint. Is the poem Wordsworth’s attempt to differentiate between innocent childhood positivity and adulthood cynicism or is it merely an expression of what was a very common topic in the time of Romanticism; death. In this paper, I will be analyzing ‘We Are Seven’ through the lense of the historical significance of child death in the time of Romanticism and the Industrial Revolution.

To say that Romanticism and the Industrial Revolution are connected is a vast understatement. The rise of modern industry in city centers led to a boom of technological and urban advancement at the cost of encroaching on nature’s territory and the expulsion of several pollutants into the Earth had several writers who would all go on to write foundational Romantic pieces running for the hills. Likewise, a rise of workable jobs in an economy that continuously didn’t favor the lower class led to the employment of large numbers of children. This, the unhealthy workload placed onto children in dangerous environments all in a time period where modern medicine amounted to little more than prayer, all combines to add up to an abhorrently high child mortality rate. It is therefore entirely understandable why the topic of infant and child death is so common a topic in Romantic Era poetry and beyond. Wordsworth, as one of the founding fathers of the Romantic Movement, broached the subject in ‘We Are Seven’.

I find the tone of ‘We Are Seven’ exceptionally interesting for a multitude of reasons. Wordsworth expertly weaves two completely separate tones into his poem with the conflicting viewpoints of the child and the adult. The child speaks with an ere of optimism despite the depressing circumstances, as evidenced in the lines “’Twas throwing words away; for still/The little Maid would have her will,/And said, “Nay, we are seven!””. In contrast, the adult speaker of the poem refuses to understand a mindset of peace or contentment, saying ““But they are dead; those two are dead!/Their spirits are in heaven!””. Wordsworth, proving his mastery more so in this poem than many of his others in my own humble opinion, constructs a poem about an incredibly divisive subject for the time that perfectly and organically allows every reader to take their preferred side and come away happy. Parents or other adults depressed at the mortality of their children can come away from the poem shaking their heads at childhood naivety. Likewise, optimistic or youthful persons can read the poem and enjoy the wisdom of an ignorant child and her love for her family. ‘We Are Seven’ succeeds completely in its address of Romantic Era death.