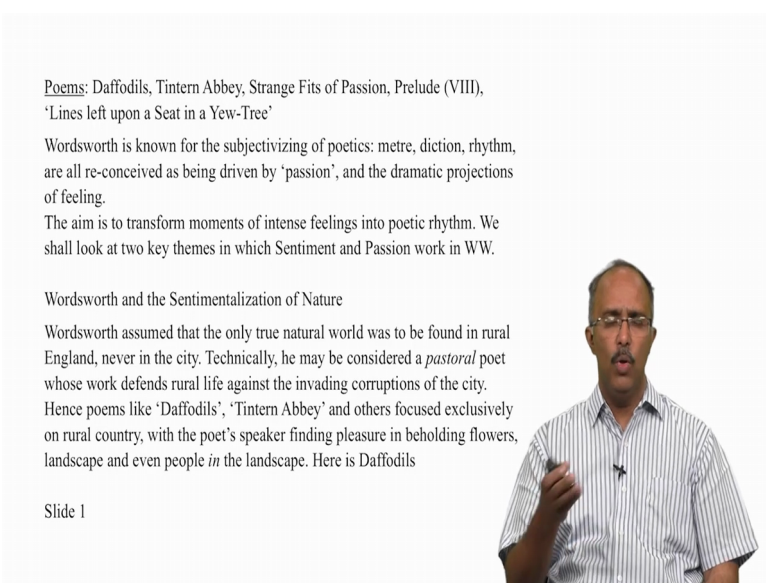
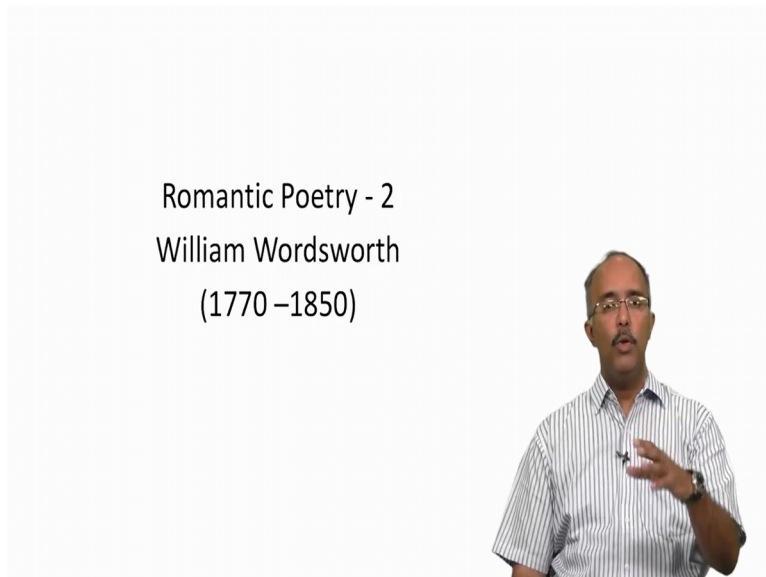


**English Literature of the Romantic Period, 1798-1832**  
**Professor Pramod K Nayar**  
**Department of English**  
**University of Hyderabad**  
**Romantic Poetry 2: William Wordsworth (1770-1850)**

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Hello everybody, in this week we have looked at 2 sessions in which we have been exploring questions of sentiment, sensibility, passion and the paradox at the heart of the Wordsworth's generation of having sentiment on one side and reason and the connections between them. We now move onto specific authors. Today's session will be devoted to arguably the most famous of the Romantic writers, William Wordsworth, 1770 to 1850. Some of the poems frequently

anthologised daffodils, Tinton Abbey, strange fits of passion, sections of the prelude will be part of what we are doing today.

Wordsworth is known primarily for converting poetics into the kind of subjectivized situation. Metre, diction, rhythm are all reconceived as being driven by passion and sentiment. Poetry therefore is a dramatic projection of sentiment. The larger aim as critics have noted is to transform moments of intense feelings into poetic rhythm. We shall look at 2 key themes in which sentiment and passion work in Wordsworth. 2, Wordsworth is a huge author, he wrote extensively, he collected works will run into several volumes.

So we will not be dealing with all of Wordsworth, we are picking 2 primary themes, Wordsworth and the sentimentalization of nature and Wordsworth's representation of nature as teacher and a few poems from here and there. Surely the extensive reading list that have been supplied over a period of the entire course should help you to explore further, including key texts like the Cambridge companion to William Wordsworth and others. So let us take our 1st theme, Wordsworth and the sentimentalization of nature.

Wordsworth assumed that the only natural world was to be found in rural England. As some of you might know, he was against industrialisation because he said nature would be destroyed. Technically therefore people argued that he may be considered as a pastoral poet, whose work defends rural life against the invasion of the city. Poems like Daffodils, Tintern Abbey focused exclusively on the rural people, its settings, including farm and jungle. And the poet speaker who finds pleasure in being there. So, for many people, many poems in Wordsworth, what you discover is pleasure, authentic passion, authentic sentiments is found only within the rural country.

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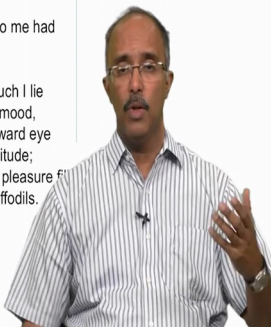
I wandered lonely as a cloud  
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,  
When all at once I saw a crowd,  
A host, of golden daffodils;  
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,  
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine  
And twinkle on the Milky Way,  
They stretched in never-ending line  
Along the margin of a bay:  
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,  
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

Wordsworth, 'Daffodils'

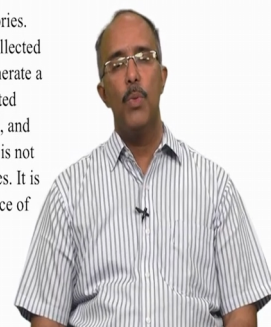
The waves beside them danced, but  
they  
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:  
A Poet could not but be gay,  
In such a jocund company:  
I gazed—and gazed—but little  
thought  
What wealth the show to me had  
brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie  
In vacant or in pensive mood,  
They flash upon that inward eye  
Which is the bliss of solitude;  
And then my heart with pleasure fills,  
And dances with the daffodils.



The 'bliss of solitude' in the last section of the poem is Wordsworth's sentimental memory of Nature. As the speaker wanders, lonely, coming upon a crowd of Daffodils is a sight that energizes him. It is a crowd, and the heads of the flowers seem to be swaying rather alarmingly (ask yourself, is a crowd of heads, swaying, such an aesthetically satisfying sight alone, or does it also generate a small amount of anxiety at least). But that apart, the speaker sees the flowers extending almost to infinity. But the key point is not the *sight* of Nature.

Wordsworth is a poet of memories, of the sentiments attached to memories. Note that the poem expresses a great joy at not Nature, but Nature recollected as memory. Nature's purpose, value is not only to induce joy but to generate a joy that can be enduring even much later. When the speaker has retreated from Nature and is lying on his couch, he recalls the sights he had seen, and finds pleasure in this recall. But one should also note that this pleasure is not everybody's. It is the poet whose mind finds the pleasure in these scenes. It is a particular kind of mind that is able to see Nature for what it is: a source of *endless* joy, even when only available as memory.



And when he writes poems like Upon Westminster Bridge, he is actually setting in place as I have noted in the earlier session, a binary between the country and the city. Here is daffodils, arguably Wordsworth's most anthologised poems, coming up on your slide now. Please take a minute to read the slide carefully. Several of you I am sure have encountered this poem before. It begins like much Wordsworth's, with the focus on the eye, the speaker, the person who is watching nature, documenting it and responding with his senses to nature but also documenting his response.

And he will have an image where as he turns a corner, he will find a crowd of daffodils staring at him and they are all waving in the air. A host, I saw a crowd, a host of golden daffodils besides the lake, beneath the trees, fluttering and dancing in the breeze. Continuous

as the stars that shine and trickle on the Milky Way, they stretched in never-ending line along the margin of a bay. Ten thousand saw I at a glance, tossing their heads in sprightly dance. And then he would say in such a jocund company, a poet could not but be gay. I gazed and gazed but little thought what wealth the show to me had brought.

Then the poem shifts. So, in the 1st 3 stanzas, Wordsworth walking along, encounters a group of flowers, he gazes at them and when the poem ends, is not in the midst of those flowers, he is back home. For oft in my coach, couch I lie in vacant or in pensive mood, they flashed upon that inward eye, which is the place of solitude. And then my heart with pleasure fills and dances with the daffodils. The bliss of solitude in the last section of the poem's Wordsworth's sentimental memory of nature. It is not nature, to the memory of nature and we will have to pay some attention to this.

Let us take it step-by-step. As the speaker wanders, lonely he says, he comes upon a crowd of daffodils, the site energises him. Now, it is important to recognise how he documents the feelings that he encounters, that he experiences. All at once I saw a crowd, a host of golden daffodils. Now in this particular segment, there are several complicated ratings possible and I will offer you one. It maybe not be exactly what you have thought about before. The traditional way of thinking about it is as he comes upon the crowded daffodils, the site is very beautiful and later he, does an aesthetically satisfying site and later he goes back home, lies down on the couch and recalls whatever he is saying.

It is however possible that there is a little something else going on in those lines. Let us go back to the poem, what is he saying? All at once I saw a crowd, a host of golden daffodils. How many are there, ten thousand saw I at a glance, tossing their heads in a sprightly dance. What I want you to pay attention to is a couple of awkward moments here. He does not say that he saw ten thousand, he says ten thousand saw I. And all the flowers are turned towards him, looking at him, crowd of daffodils singing and dancing and moving.

He comes across a crowd of ten thousand. There is a problematic word host as well being used in the 4th line of the poem. A host etymologically and Wordsworth would know his Latin from the word hostess, means both guest and enemy. Now if you were to think carefully about the other meaning of the word host, enemies, what does the poem read like? So the traditional argument has been that he meets this very enchanting sight of daffodils and it enthuses him, it makes a very happy and he goes back home and there his heart with pleasure fills when he recalls the daffodils.



That is one reading, that is more conventional, that is more comforting reading shall we say. But that is not all, like I said, coming across a crowd of ten thousand heads and that is the description he gives, ten thousand saw I at a glance tossing their heads in sprightly dance. He does not say that they were flowers, he does not say they were a garden, they stretched in a never-ending line and there are ten thousand heads that are moving. The word host in conjunction with tossing their heads in sprightly dance communicates perhaps and that is my alternative reading, a slightly anxious condition.

So while you might agree that it is aesthetically beautiful to see ten thousand flowers, suggested to you that that is not the only passion aroused in the Wordsworthian speaker. It is a crowd of heads of waving, so imagine yourself, he is not saying ten thousand heads of flowers, ten thousand heads waving in the air, would you be happy with it, would I be happy with it, no, it is a little disconcerting actually speaking. So it is a crowd at the heads of the flowers seem to be swaying rather alarmingly. And the speaker sees flowers extending almost sincerity.

So there is a disquieting passion also at work in those 1st 3 stanzas, that is my thesis. So it is a poem about passion, yes, it is a poem about being enthused by nature, yes. But the enthusiasm of nature is not only in terms of wonderful, pleasant fashion, it is about something else as well. The last stanza complicates it. Wordsworth is a poet of memories and of the sentiments attached to memories, not the sentiments themselves or the memories themselves, but the sentiments and memories together. Note that the poem expresses our great joy at not nature but nature recollected, not when he is seeing them... The argument I would make if I were trying to be funny, he runs away from those flowers and he is happier when he recalls flowers than when he sees them.

You might of course be morally outraged at this reading of the canonical Wordsworth but my point is that you see ten thousand heads swaying, like something out of a horror film, strange creatures, then you run away. The only way you can deal with it is by recalling it when you are not at the heart of the crowd of daffodils. So, Wordsworth is a poet of memories, he is expressing joy, not at nature but nature recollected, nature as memory. Nature's purpose of value is not only to induce joy but to generate a joy that can be enduring much later.

So when the speaker has retreated from nature, when he has gone away from nature and he is lying on the couch, that he recalls a sight he has seen. And then he finds pleasure. Look at what he is saying, the flash upon that inward eye, which is a bliss of solitude and then my

heart with pleasure fills. The key phrasing is and then my heart with pleasure fills and dances with the daffodils. Nature is a source of endless joy, even when available only in memory. This rather utilitarian view of natural beauty can be found in Tintern Abbey as well. Coming up next on your slide the other famous Wordsworth, Tintern Abbey.

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We see this similar utilitarian view of Natural beauty in Tintern Abbey as well:

Slide 2



Though absent long,  
These forms of beauty have not been to me  
As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:  
But oft, in lonely rooms, and mid the din  
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,  
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,  
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart,  
And passing even into my purer mind  
With tranquil restoration:—feelings too  
Of unremembered pleasure; such, perhaps,  
As may have had no trivial influence  
On that best portion of a good man's life  
Tintern Abbey



The speaker here says he has owed his best moments to the recall of Nature, when he was away elsewhere.

In the Intimations ode he would write:

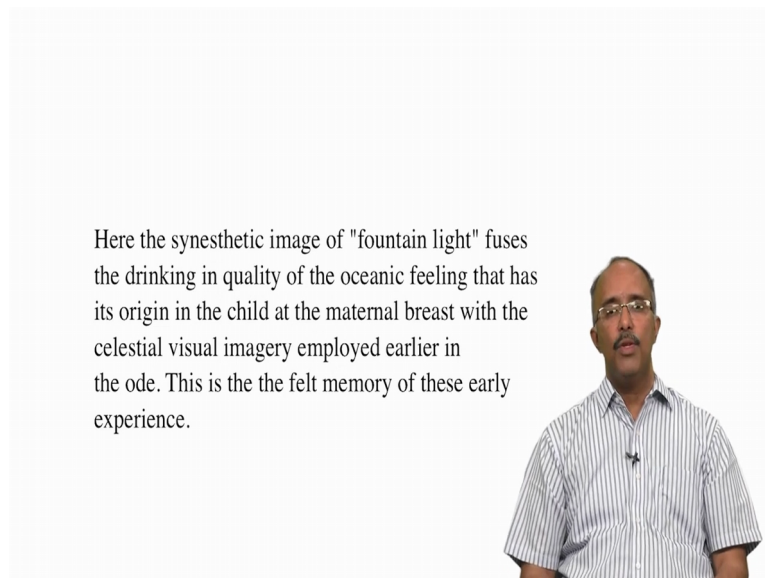
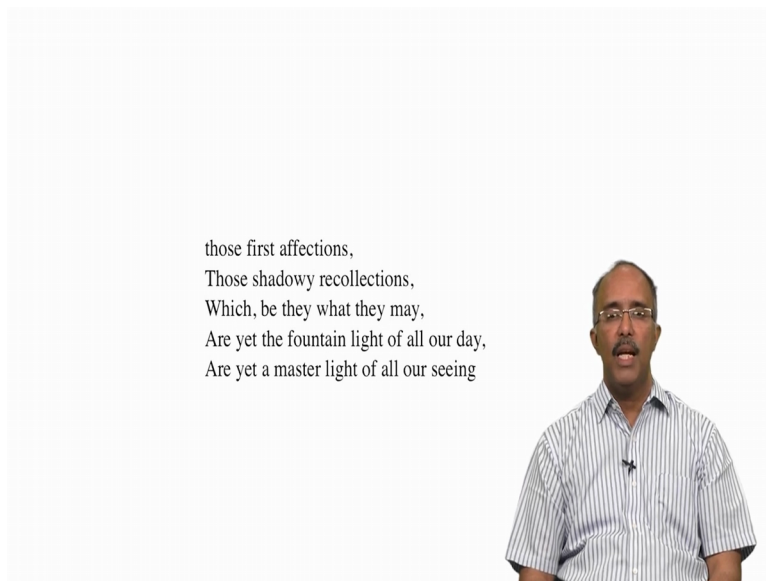
Slide 3



Though absent long, these forms of beauty have not been to me as a landscape to apply man's eye but oft in lonely rooms and mid the din of towns and cities, have owed to them in hours of wariness, sensations sweet. Felt in the blood and felt along the heart and passing even into my purer mind with tranquil restoration feelings too of unremembered pleasure, such perhaps as may have had no trivial influence on that better portion of a good man's life. What is he saying here? The speaker says he has poured his best moments to the recall of Nature when he is away elsewhere, that is what he is saying.

He says even when the beautiful forms are absent, it is not like they are invisible, in lonely rooms when I am listening to the sounds outside of the din of towns and cities, I owe to them sensations sweet. This is about memory of nature, not about nature per se. It is memories, nature recalled. 3rd slide coming upon intimations, where he would say much the same things.

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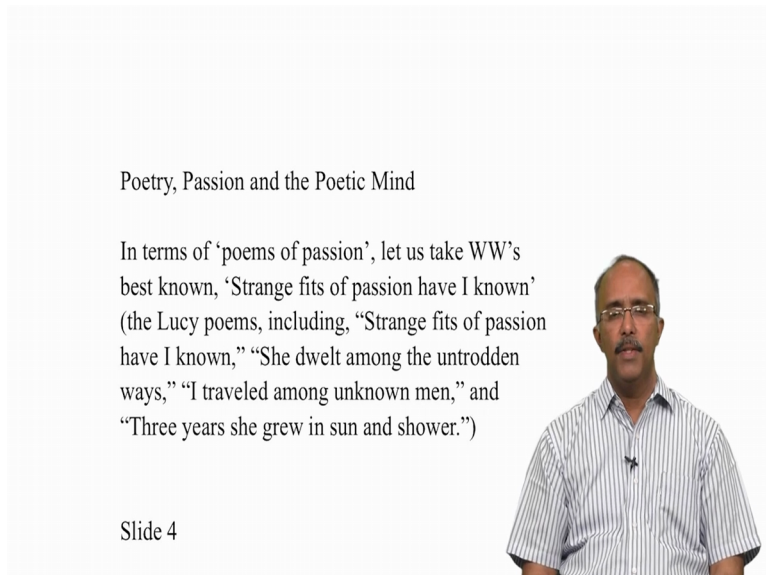


Read those lines, 5 of them, those 1st affections, shadowy recollections, which be there what they may, are yet the fountain light of all our day, are yet a master light of all our seeing. And here is the synesthetic image of fountain light fuses the drinking in quality of the oceanic feeling that has its origin in the child at the maternal breast with the celestial visual imagery employed earlier. This is again affect memory. What are we talking about him? What Wordsworth is talking about is not nature or the experience of nature, but the recollection of those experiences of nature.

It is in the ability to recall events and the sentiments you had 1st experienced. In fact if you read the Tintern Abbey poem carefully, it is a 2nd visit to Tintern Abbey, he says I have come here again. When he is visiting it again, he still recalls the sentiments from the 1st time.

When he has moved away from daffodils, he recalls daffodils. Solitary Reaper and with that poem, will no one tell me what she sings, he has moved away from the solitary Reaper and recalls it. The poetic mind does not only recall nature, it recalls the sentiments attached to nature, that is the key.

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Poetry, Passion and the Poetic Mind

In terms of 'poems of passion', let us take WW's best known, 'Strange fits of passion have I known' (the Lucy poems, including, "Strange fits of passion have I known," "She dwelt among the untrodden ways," "I traveled among unknown men," and "Three years she grew in sun and shower.")

Slide 4

The slide features a man in a striped shirt and glasses standing on the right side. The background is a light, neutral color.

So the focus in what I am saying is not on sentimental nature, it is on the sentimentalization of nature via memory. That is what I would like you to keep in mind. We will move on to another theme Poetry, Passion and the Poetic Mind. In terms of poems of passion, let us take Wordsworth's best-known "strange fits of passion have I known" from the loose poem, coming up next on your slide. Strange fits of passion I have known and I will dare to tell but in the lovers ears alone what once to me befell. When she I loved was strong and gay and I like arose in June, I to her cottage bet my way, beneath the evening moon.

Upon the moon I fixed my eye, are over the wide lea, my horse trudged on and we drew nigh, those parts so dear to me. And we reach the Orchard plot and as we climbed the hill, towards the roof of Lucy's cot, the moon descended style. A hand, then he moves further on, but something else is happening, that is what he is saying next. In one of those sweet dreams I slapped, Kind Nature's gentlest boon, and all the while my eyes I kept on the descent moon. My horse moved on hoof after hoof he raised and never stopped, went down behind the cottage roof at 1st the bright moon dropped.

What fond and wayward thoughts will slide, look at what he is saying, it is about now the measurement, the quantification, the description of the kinds of thoughts the speaker has.

What fond and wayward thoughts will slide into a Lauer said, oh Mercy to myself I cried, if Lucy should be dead. The man is approaching the house of the beloved and at that point he is asking in the poem ends, I have travelled all this way, what if Lucy worded? The poem is a fantasy, it has an effect of a morbid imagination, is not it.

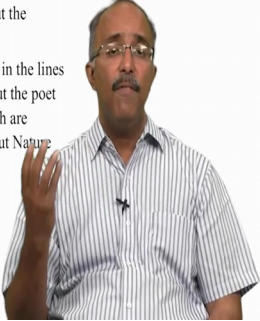
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The poem is a fantasy, an effect of a morbid imagination. The poem ends with the conventional tears and sentiments of the age of sensibility. The poem is less on Lucy than on the effect of her death on the speaker. It is actually what WW termed a 'fit of imagination' in *Lyrical Ballads*. The 'wayward thoughts' are the effects of a fertile imagination. For critics like Barbara Johnson, the phrase is resonant of WW's craft itself:

'poetry is a fit, an outburst, an overflow, of feeling;  
and poetry is an attempt to fit, to arrange, feeling into form' ('Strange Fits: Poe and Wordsworth on the Nature of Poetic Language,')

It is important to recognize that it is the poet with a better mind and a man of feeling who responds like this to Nature. Thus, WW is actually foregrounding not Nature but the seeing-feeling poet at the centre of things.

Moreover, WW's poetry is full of meditations on his processes of seeing. Thus, in the lines from Tintern Abbey, we can clearly note that it is not observations of Nature, but the poet being aware of his observations that are the centerpiece. 'I felt', 'I saw' and such are reflections on how he observed various things. This makes WW less a poet about Nature than a poet about poetic observation of Nature.



The poem ends with the conventional tears and sentiments of the age of sensibility. The poem is less on Lucy, whether is Lucy in this actually, you do not find Lucy. Lucy's death and the effect on the speaker is a subject of the poem. It is actually what Wordsworth termed a Fit of imagination and lyrical balance. The wayward thoughts are the effects of a fertile imagination. For critics like Barbara Johnson, the phrase is resonant of Wordsworth's craft itself. Poetry is a fit, an outburst, an overflow of feeling and poetry is an attempt to fit, to arrange feeling into form.

That is Barbara Johnson's reworking of Wordsworth's own argument about feeling and form. It is important to recognise that it is a poet with a better mind and a man of feeling who responds like this to nature. It is not you and I, it is a special kind of poetic mind. So Wordsworth is actually foreground ink not nature but the poet who sees and who feels at the centre of things. There is a traditional argument that Wordsworth is a poet of nature. No, Wordsworth is a poet of poets. He is not interested in nature per se, he is interested in the effects of restaurant poets and poetry minds.


Wordsworth's poetry is full of politicians honest processes of seeing, how do I see, what emotions come to me, how do those emotions come to me. In the life from Tinton abbey, we

can clearly note that it is not observations of nature but the poet being aware of the observations that are at the centre. I felt, I saw, I believe. The Wordsworth is not just a poet of nature, he is a poet who observes, poet is observing nature. What is nature in Wordsworth.

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Nature as teacher.

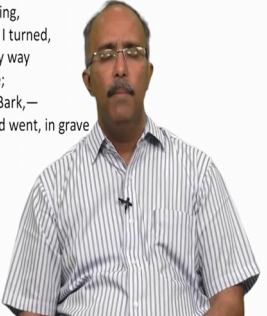
Slide 5

A man with glasses and a mustache, wearing a light-colored striped short-sleeved shirt, is speaking. He is positioned in the lower right quadrant of the slide.

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

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

Wordsworth, *The Prelude*

A man with glasses and a mustache, wearing a light-colored striped short-sleeved shirt, is speaking. He is positioned in the lower right quadrant of the slide.

Even in poems like 'The Solitary Reaper', the poet-speaker is careful to note that he is now the sole source of the song he heard the Reaper sing.

'The music in my heart I bore

Long after it was heard no more'.

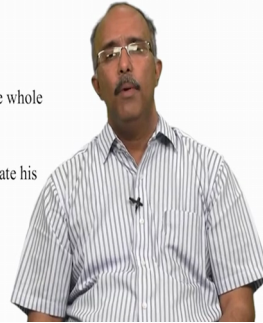
That is, the poet-speaker is able to recall, with pleasure, the song.

In Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* WW would write:

[T]he Poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth, and over all time'

The poetic mind elevates the poet, even helping him measure and evaluate his experiences, as in these lines from the *Prelude* (book 8):

Slide 6



Nature is a teacher in some of the Wordsworth's poems. Look at the excerpt now on your slides, on your screens from the prelude. This is a famous boat stealing incidents. One summer evening, I found a little boat ride to a willow tree within a rocky case, its usual home. Then he unchains it and gets into the boat and moves. As he moves, he sees something, a huge peak, black and huge. As if with voluntary power instincts, feared its head and the boy, now is, he is in the boat, I struck and struck against and growing still in stature the grim shape covered up between me and the stars.

And still, for so it seemed, with offers of its own and measured motion like a living thing strode after me. Wordsworth's nature here chastises him for stealing the boat. The entire boat stealing incident showcases nature not as a pleasing, wonderful, pleasure inducing thing but as somebody who is willing to be a teacher, chastise you for doing something wrong. Even in poems like the solitary Reaper, the poet speaker is careful to note that he is now the sole source of the song and he will say this.

The music in my heart I bore long after it was heard no more. It is a poet speaker whose ability to recall that is being showcased. And he recalls Of course with pleasure and the song, and I am connecting this set of line, the music in my heart I bore long after it was heard no more to the preface to the lyrical ballads, in which Wordsworth would write. The poet binds together by passion and knowledge, the vast empire of human society as it is spread over the whole earth and overall time.



(Refer Slide Time: 18:31)

the pulse of being everywhere was felt,  
When all the several frames of things, like stars  
Through every magnitude distinguishable,  
Were half confounded in each other's blaze,  
One galaxy of life and joy. Then rose  
Man, inwardly contemplated, and present  
In my own being, to a loftier height [. . .]  
Acknowledging dependency sublime  
*The Prelude Book VIII*



Occasionally there is a recognition that the mind is a little too influenced by the sights and sounds, that it obsessively looks for and discovers traces and emblems of oneself in the world around as in these lines from 'Lines left upon a Seat in a Yew-Tree':

Slide 6



on these barren rocks, with juniper,  
And heath, and thistle, thinly sprinkled o'er,  
Fixing his downward eye, he many an hour  
A morbid pleasure nourished, tracing here  
An emblem of his own unfruitful life.  
'Lines left upon a Seat in a Yew-Tree'



This poetic mind enables the poet to rise above the frenzy and the politics of everyday life and the nation. Most notable in this kind of WW is the famous 'immortality ode' where the speaker seeks transcendence of the material world and the world of strife and anxiety. While one tradition of Romantic criticism (MH Abrams, notably) sees this spiritualizing of the Nature as a great feat, subsequent commentators (Jerome McGann, *The Romantic Ideology*) have seen WW as evading addresses to contemporary politics.



The poetic mind in other words elevates the poems. He is above everybody else, but it also helps evaluate his own experiences, as we following line show from the prelude book 8, coming up on your screen now. The pulse of being everywhere was felt, were also several frames of things like stars through every magnitude distinguishable, were half confounded in each other's blaze. One galaxy of life and joy, then rose man, inwardly contemplated and present in my own being too lofty height, acknowledging dependency sublime.

Occasional in Wordsworth, there is a recognition that the mind is a little too influenced by the sights and sounds, that there is a little too much of nature impinging. Coming up on your slide is a set of lines from, lines left upon a seat in a Yew tree. On these barren rocks with Juniper and Heath and Thistle, thinly sprinkled over, fixing his downward eye, he many an hour a morbid pleasure nourished, tracing here an emblem of his own unfruitful life. The poetic mind, like we have just said, enables the poet to rise about the frenzy and politics of everyday life. So, when you look carefully at this valorisation, this glorification of solitude, it is actually a distancing from the everyday messes of our lives. The poet moves it, moves away from that, and rises above it.

The speaker seeks a transcendence of the material world and you will see this most notably in the immortality ode. One tradition of romantic criticism, most notably MH Abrams, has seen this as a spiritualisation of nature and they say it is a huge achievement, where Wordsworth's references to nature and analysis of nature is actually spiritualisation. Later commentators have seen this as an evasion of politics itself. So, what do we recall here? Passion, poetic mind, nature as teacher, complicated things in Wordsworth.

Wordsworth's speaker is not interested in nature per se but in nature recalled, memories recalled. And below that poems like daffodils which do this. But it is also important to note that poets transcendence, the poets transcendence of the material world can also be read as an evasion. So, it is not a question of just glorifying nature, it is a question of thing in mind with the everyday, even if you have a poetic mind. Thank you.