

English Literature of the Romantic Period, 1798-1832
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Romantic Poetry 2: Nature, the Environment and Ecology Wordsworth

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WW's fascination with Nature can be read along two lines for our purposes. The ideas, images and themes that have resulted in his being anointed as the Poet of Nature, and the contemporary assessment of his attitudes.




Hello everybody, having already discussed in some ways nature the environment and ecology in the English Romantic writers, we will now turn to specific poets. Let us begin with the biggest name among all of them William Wordsworth, Wordsworth's fascination with nature can be read along to major lines ideas, images and themes that have resulted in his becoming so called poet of nature and the contemporary assessment of his attitudes. I already mentioned in the previous talk that Jonathan Bate a major eco critic has made the argument that several items and themes and concerns in William Wordsworth show signs of a proto environmentalism and his ideas can be seen occurring in different form varied forms in 20th century environmentalism as well.

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Wordsworth's Nature

It was the Victorians who saw him as 'Prophet of Nature' due to such lines. Coleridge praised Wordsworth for drawing our attention to the world around us:

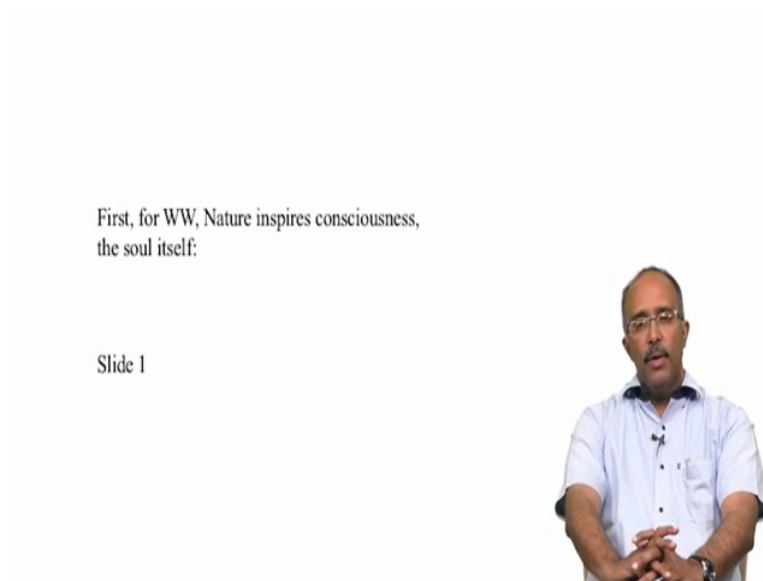
by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us; an inexhaustible treasure, but for which, in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude we have eyes, yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand.



So what is Wordsworth's nature line? (sorry about the pun) what 's Wordsworth nature line? It was the Victorians who saw him primarily as a point of profit of nature first and from then the label has kind of stuck, the Victorians who saw him as a prophet of nature primarily because of lines where he said and which we have looked at whatever I am it is because of the consciousness that has come to me via our nature.

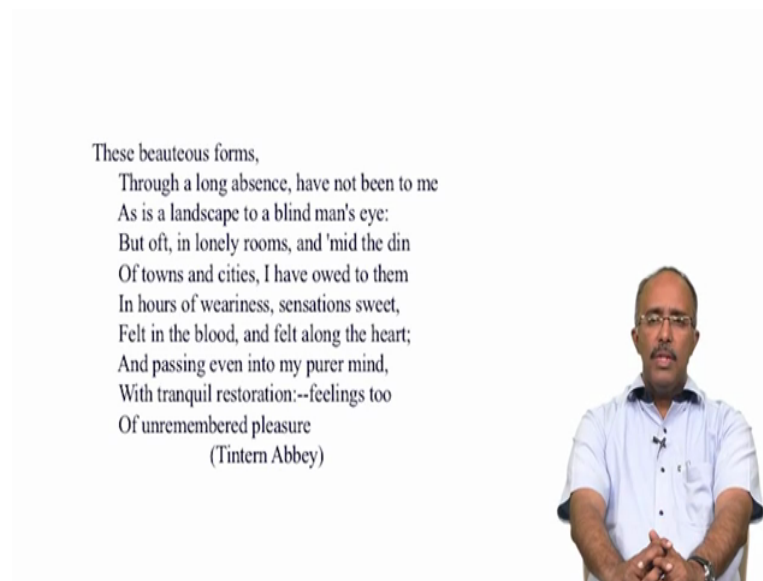
Coleridge himself praised Wordsworth for drawing our attention to the world around us and this is what Coleridge says and I quote, by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us and inexhaustible treasure, but for which, in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude we have eyes, yet see not, years that hear not and hearts that neither feel nor understand.

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So in Wordsworth's nature what is the first thing we look at? For Wordsworth nature inspires consciousness, it inspires the soul itself take a look at the passage from Tintern Abbey now coming up on your slide please read those lines carefully.

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In those lines Wordsworth says I have owed to them as in the landscape and the senses that he gets from it 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, where are these feelings coming from? The opening lines and not slide, these beautiful forms even when they are absent even when they are not directly before my eyes so to speak my mind's eye reproduces them I recall them and whenever I am in the midst of

the din of cities my sensations are sweet when I am tired my sensations are sweet, when I am exhausted I feel it in my blood nature is what gives me my soul.

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He seeks a unity of one kind: between individual integrity (Man) and social responsibility (Human Life) in the world-as-given (Nature), as Kenneth Johnston puts it. He continues in Tintern Abbey:


Slide 2



What's Wordsworth doing here? Wordsworth seeks a unity between individual integrity of the human and the social responsibility of human life in the world as given, this is Kenneth Johnston's argument that Wordsworth seeks a unity between individual integrity individual human integrity as a person, social responsibility which is human life where I am situated in a particular social context in the world has given that is nature, Wordsworth will continue on this theme in Tinton Abbey here it is again on slide 2.

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And I have felt
a presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things ...
(Tintern Abbey)



If you read those lines what is it you get? I have felt a presence that disturbs me with joy and then comes his key phrase of elevated thoughts a sense sublime of something far more deeply interfused whose dwelling is the light of setting Suns and the round ocean and the living air and the blue sky and in the mind of man, emotion and a spirit that impels all thinking things all objects of all thought and rolls through all things, this is Tinton Abbey.

The key phrase there is a sense sublime which comes to me as elevated thoughts what is Wordsworth doing here? Wordsworth is saying when I dwell in the light of setting Suns, ocean and air something moves in the mind of man, emotion and the spirit which drives my thinking my mind thought process, what goes through my mind through my process of thinking is coming in from nature itself, this is of course about elevated thoughts, the sense sublime in Wordsworth is a sense a consciousness a soul created by nature itself.

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Everything that is best in his nature, all his gifts,
in short, came from Nature:

Slide 3-4



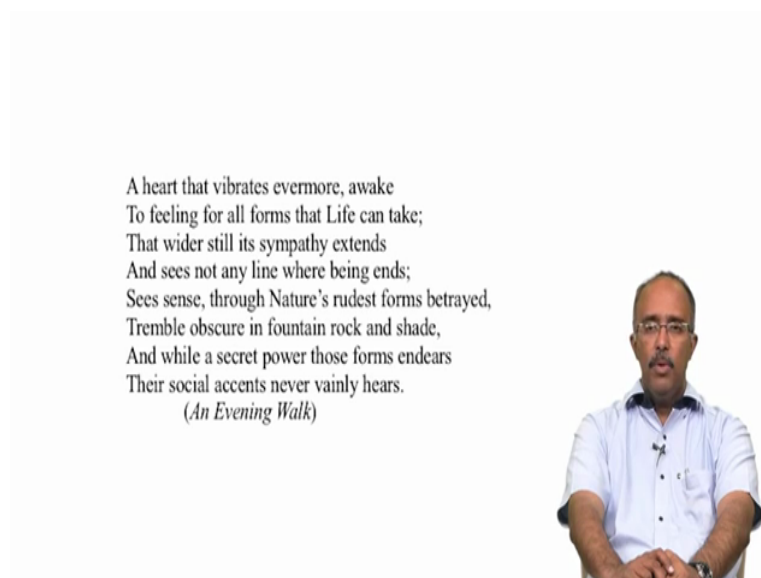
In short everything that is best in his nature came from nature with a capital M, what do we mean by this? What Wordsworth is saying is, in a poet in a person of sensibility all the good things his nature with a small n all his gifts come from nature that is with a capital M.

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He will continue thou at the same nature apostrophe, thou has fed my lofty speculations and in the for these uneasy heart of ours I find a never-failing principle of joy and purest passion, it is only nature that you can find all this. Wordsworth will spell it out in slightly different ways in an evening walk coming up on your slide now.

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A heart that vibrates evermore awake to feeling for all forms that life can take that wider still it is sympathy, B extends and C is not any line where being ends, C sense through nature's rudest fumes forms betrayed, tremble obscure in fountain rock and shade and while a secret power those forms India's their social accents never vainly peers. As you can see Wordsworth is very clearly locating himself as a medium for nature to go through, so there is nature

consciousness somewhere up there for nature to get to earth it has to go through a medium something that mediates and the poetic mind is something like that.

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In *The Excursion* Wordsworth would go further, where Natural beauty is the combination of the Promised Land, the Elysian Fields, and Paradise :


Slide 5



In the excursion Wordsworth would go even further, here you would argue that natural beauty is a combination of the promised land, the LCN fields and paradise, here is a passage from the excursion coming up on your slide now.

(Refer Slide Time: 6:34)

Beauty, whose living home is the green earth, ...
Pitches her tents before me when I move,
An hourly Neighbour. Paradise and groves
Elysian, fortunate islands, fields like those of old
In the deep ocean – wherefore should they be
A History, or but a dream, when minds
Once wedded to this outward frame of things
In love, find these the growth of common day?
(The Excursion)




Beauty who is living home is the green earth, pitches attends before me when I move, an hourly neighbour paradise and grows elysian, fortunate islands, feels like those of old in the

deep ocean, wherefore should they be a history, or but a dream, when minds once wedded to this outward frame of things in love find these the growth of human common day?

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But why turn to Nature? Wordsworth sees Nature as enabling an escape from humanity. In the same poem he writes:


Slide 6



But why turn to nature at all? Wordsworth sees nature as something that enables an escape from humanity, in the same poem the excursion he would write this coming up on your slide now.

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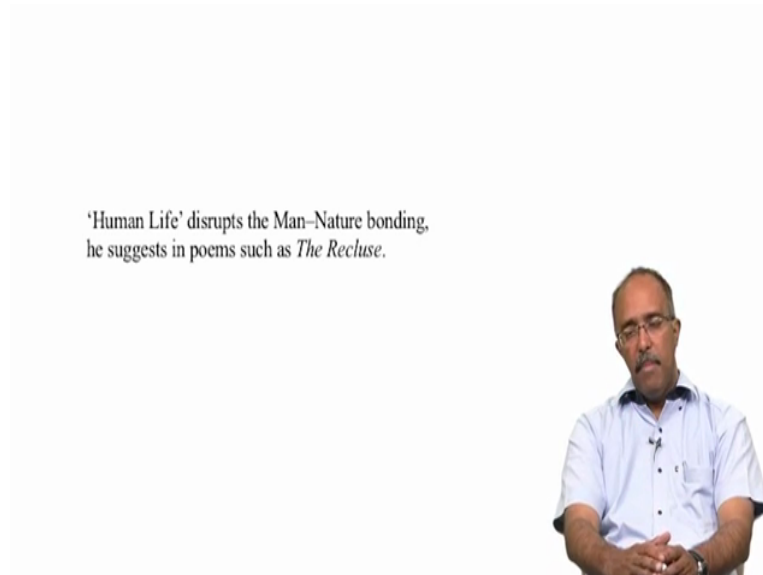
Must turn elsewhere, and travel near the tribes
And fellowships of men, see ill sights
Of passions ravenous from each other's rage,
Must hear humanity in fields and groves
Pipe solitary anguish, or must hang
Brooding over the fierce *confederate* storm
Of Sorrow, *barricadoed evermore*
Within the walls of cities – may these sounds
Have their authentic comment, that even these Hearing,
I be not heartless or forlorn!



Must turn elsewhere and travel near the tribes and fellowships of men, see insights of passions ravenous from each other's rage, must share humanity in fields and groves by solitary anguish or must hang brooding over the fierce Confederate storm of sorrow,

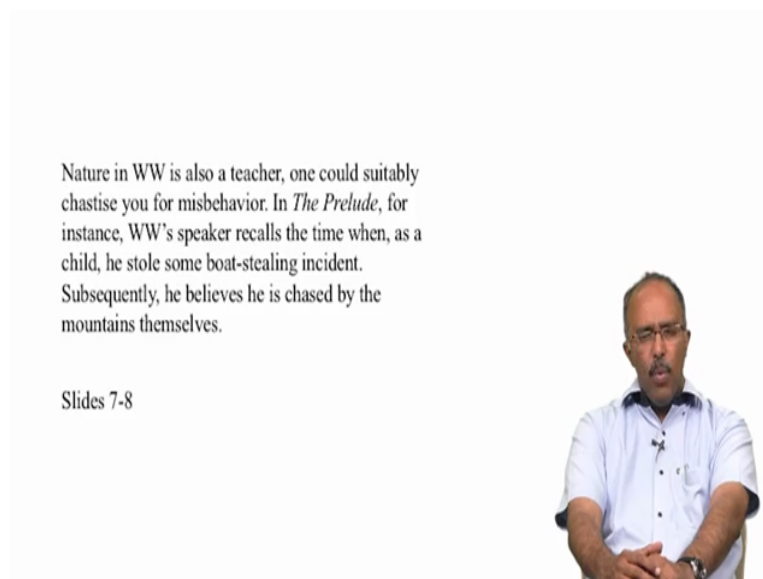
barricadoed evermore, within the walls of cities may these sounds have their authentic comment that even less and even these hearing I be not fearless off alone.

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Human life sometimes disrupts the man nature bonding at some point as you recall Wordsworth to say the world is too much with us, so my companionship my connection with the soul of nature is interrupted by human life the everyday life that we have to do, he suggests this in a poem like the recluse where this bond this this dense bond between man and nature is broken because of the intrusion of everyday life. But that is not just nature as something wonderful.

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In some of Wordsworth you see nature as a teacher I could possibly chastise you from his behaviour, in the prelude for instance Wordsworth speaker recalls a time when as a child he stole some he stole a boat, subsequently he believes he is chased by the mountains themselves coming up on your slide now extracts from the prelude, here is the famous boat stealing incidents.

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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.



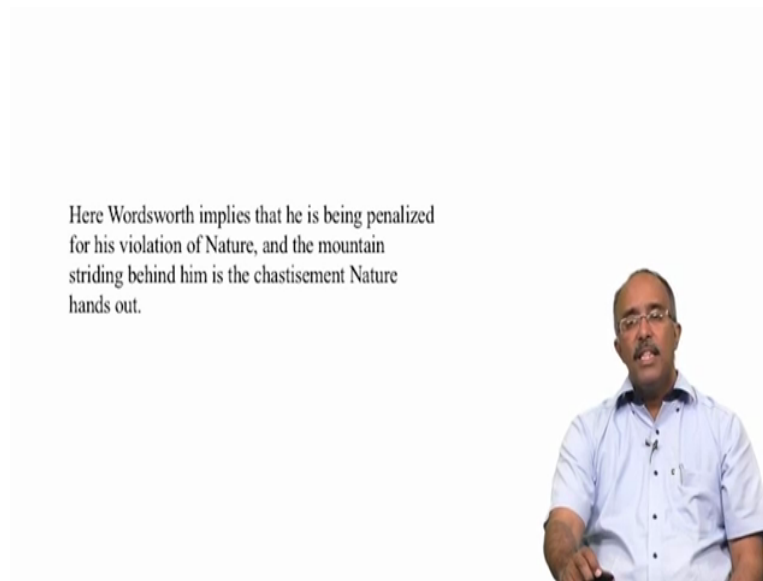
One summer evening led by her I found a little boat tied it to a willow tree within a rocky cave its usual home. Straight I unloosed her chain and stepping in pushed from the shore it was an act of stealth a hand troubled pleasure. Note what he is saying here, he has stolen a boat, it is an act of stealth but it is also troubled a pleasure so it is not just anxiety there is pleasure but it is a little trouble as in he is not sure he should go through with this and then comes his next set of lines.

So as he gets into the boat and moves on he looks back this way and startled to see something behind its craggy steep till then the horizons bound a huge peak black and huge, what is the peak doing? As if with voluntary power instinct up reared its head up reared its head I struck and struck again and growing till is growing still in stature the grim shape the mountain seems to be enlarging what happens to this shape the grim shape towered up between me and the stars and still for so it seemed with purposes of its own and measured no motion like a living thing strode after me.

What is Wordsworth doing? Wordsworth is saying I have taken the boat I have stolen it and I am going away but when I look behind me like this I see this huge peak black and chasing me

it seems to have reared its head his the phrase he uses up rear its head and he quickly goes on in the boat and then he realizes I have done something wrong I should not have stolen the boat and look at the description he towered up between me and the stars and still for purposes just for a second of just just being safe I was not sure what the mountain means then he says with trembling oars I turned and through the silent water stole up my way stole my way back to the cart of the willow tree back to the covert of the willow tree, there in a mooring place I left my bark and through the meadows alone rest in grave and serious mood.

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Here what's what implies that he is been penalized for his violation of nature and the mountain is striding behind him is the violated nature who is so angry that he started give some kind of punishments some kind of chastisement.

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Recent reevaluations have modified this interpretation of WW as a purely pastoral poet. Ralph Pite in *The Cambridge Companion to Wordsworth* argues that 'in Wordsworth's work 'the natural world' is always social, both in itself and in its relation to man. Consequently, nature does not offer an escape from other people so much as express an alternative mode of relating to them'.

Wordsworth's natural world is always the countryside, and implicitly positing the city as unnatural and one of artifice. His position on Nature is the defence of the rural way of life, as famously stated in the preface to the Lyrical Ballads where he claims that passions and sentiment are more natural in the rustic zones.

Nature possesses healing power, when man is assaulted by the everyday, claims Wordsworth. Nature bestows his poetry with something special: the 'sense sublime / Of something far more deeply interfused'.



Recent evaluations have modified this interpretation of Wordsworth as a purely pastoral writer, Ralph Pite in the Cambridge companion to Wordsworth argues that in Wordsworth's work the natural world is always social, in itself and in its relation to man natural world is social, if you recall in the last class we mentioned that the idea that nature and culture are binary is itself a cultural construction.

So the natural world is always social both in itself and its relation to man, consequently nature does not offer an escape from other people, it does not become a place to go to as refuge. Wordsworth's natural world is always the countryside and implicitly positing the city as unnatural and one of artifice. So nature is pure in the country, in the city it is all artifice and corrupt, his position on nature is the defence of the rural way of life, a defence of the rural way of life as purer.

If you recall what we have said about the preface to the (())(12:27) balance he makes this point constantly that the emotions there are true, the language there is true, everything about the rural place is very nice it is a (())(12:37). So he claims that passions and sentiment are moral are more natural in the rustic zones. So there is this myth let us call it that admits that people in the rural areas are more honest are more intellectual even if they do not have the language and it is of course a primarily problem of language itself.

Nature possesses healing powers, it cures the problems in you especially when man is assaulted by the everyday, nature bestows his poetry with something special. Please recall

what we have quoted from the Tinton Abbey poem the sense sublime in me the sense sublime within me of something far more deeply interfused.

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Jonathan Bate's reading of WW in *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (1991) as an early environmentalist has been of great influence in recent times.

Bate notes how WW situates his poems in very specific locales. This groundedness is of immense value because it suggests a deep-seated connection with *place*. This would be in line with the Deep Ecology philosophy of feeling a connection with specific places. Hence Bate believes that WW was "as much geographer as historian. Consequently, there are studies now of WW's interest in geology, in the soil and rocks of particular places (Noah Herringman's work).




I now turn to Wordsworth's environmentalism, Jonathan Bates reading of William Wordsworth in *romantic ecology Wordsworth and the environmental tradition 1991* has sees Wordsworth as an early environmentalist, Bate notes how Wordsworth situates his poem in very specific locals, this groundedness is of immense value because it suggests a deep-seated connection with place, this would be in line with the Deep Ecology philosophy of feeling connection with specific places.

Hence, Bate believes that Wordsworth was as much a geographer as a historian as much a geographer as a historian, consequently there are studies increasingly in the last 10 years or so that shows Wordsworth's interesting things like rocks and geology, I am referring here to Noah Herringman's work.

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For Bate, WW is not simply idealizing pastoral worlds. Bate terms WW's pastoral "a working paradise" (22). It is a pastoral of labour, of hard work, and is not idealized as a Golden Age. Further, Bate notes that WW was concerned about the effects of industrialization and urbanization on the environment, of economics on ecology, and this concern is the foundation of ecological thought today. There is of course a certain moralizing around Nature in WW, Bate agrees, but that is precisely what contemporary ecocriticism has revived in many places.




For Bate Wordsworth is not simply idolizing about pastel worlds, Bate terms Wordsworth's pastoral and working paradise that is Bates own description and working paradise, it is a pastoral not Arcadian, it involves hard work not just (())(14:34), it is not idealized as a golden age, Bate notes that Wordsworth was concerned about the effects of globalization and industrialization even that was happening in England at the time, there is a certain moralizing feature about Wordsworth's depictions of nature of course.

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Bate admits that there is some merit in the criticism that WW ought to have written more about the economic conditions of his period, conditions which determined human society's interactions with nature and the land. Thus, the pastoral poetic form which paints Nature as glorious is particularly indicted. Raymond Williams has this to say about Sidney's Arcadia:

It is not easy- to forget that Sidney's Arcadia. which gives a continuing title to English neo-pastoral, was written in a park which had been made by enclosing a whole village and evicting the. tenants.

Alan Liu writes: 'there is no nature except as it is constituted by acts of political definition made possible by particular forms of government', implying that 'Nature' is a discursive construct made possible by questions of economic relations and political power'.



Bate admits that there is some merit in the criticism that Wordsworth ought to have written more about nature per say, but Wordsworth seems to be always for grounding himself the speaker, it is not easy to forget that Philip Sidney's Arcadia which gives a continuing title to

English neo pastoral was written in a park which shall be made by enclosing a whole village and evicting the human, Philip Sidney's (15:16) text Arcadia is actually praising these kinds of lands, but as Jonathan Bate points out he is talking about lands which have been taken in and guarded and fenced off.

The other famous critic Alan Liu writes that there is no nature except as it is a experienced constituted by acts of political definition and wherever possible forms of government, he implies that nature is a discursive construct made possible were questions of economic relations and power.

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Despite these misgivings about Wordsworth's pastoral idealism Bate proposes that Wordsworth offers us a working parent is not an ideal Arcadian one as in people had to work it is not Edenic says Bate in lines such as these, these are lines that you are seeing up from book 8 of the preload 1805 Edition.

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And Shepherds were the men that pleased me first;
Not such as, 'mid Arcadian fastnesses
Sequestered, handed down among themselves,
So ancient poets sing, the golden age;
Nor such, a second race, allied to these,
As Shakespeare in the wood of Arden placed
Where Phoebe sighed for the false Ganymede,
Or there where Florizel and Perdita
Together danced, Queen of the feast, and King;
Nor such as Spenser fabled. . . . (Book VIII, *Prelude* 1805)

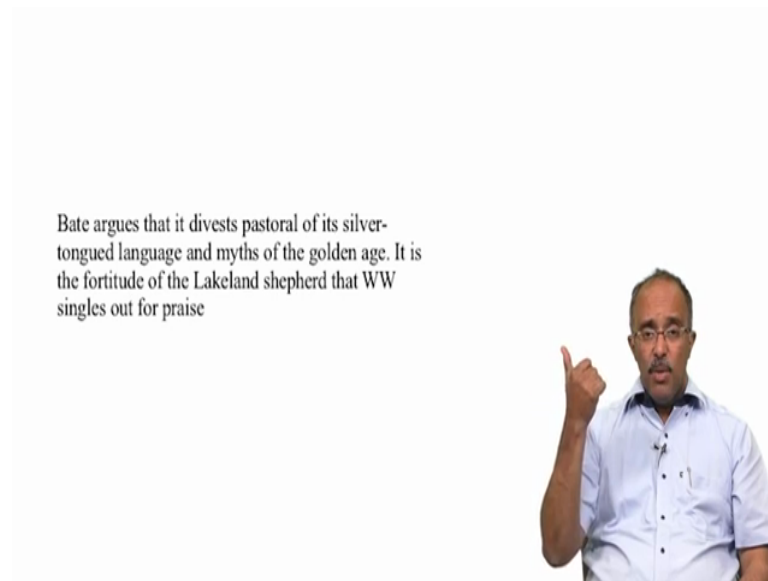
And:
the rural ways
And manners which it was my chance to see
In childhood were severe and unadorned,
The unluxuriant produce of a life
Intent on little but substantial needs,
Yet beautiful - and beauty that was felt.
But images of danger and distress
And suffering, these took deepest hold of me,
Man suffering among awful powers and forms. (Book VIII, *Prelude* 1805)



Look at the second excerpt for you on the slide, the rural ways and manners which it was my chance to see in childhood was severe (16:14) the unlikeliness (16:16) produce of life, intent on little but substantial needs, Bate argues that this kind of description divests the pastoral of its silver-tongued language and myths of the Golden Age, it is the fortitude of the Lakeland shepherd that Wordsworth (16:34) is out for praise.

As you can see our talk today has a revolve around two principal components, one the environmentalist strand in Wordsworth which we have just used Bate to analyze and then there is a quasi-mystical version of nature as well. In the environmentalist reading of Wordsworth and Johnson Bate is that that cutting edge for these ones there is a sense that it is not a perfect land it is not an Arcadian (17:04), it is a place where people have to work.

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So bates argument is that to think of Wordsworth as just a worshipper of nature is not true from what we have seen so far Wordsworth has to work at something it could be the imagination, it could be the assimilation but it is also a landscape which has to be worked at. So you see we are looking at nature in two ways land which is worked at and imagination which has to be worked at. Now I am arguing that this is an environmentally imagination being assimilated and imbibed what is important is the landscape being worked at is also the landscape of the imagination, we will see how other writers have dealt with the imagination in subsequent lessons, thank you.