



#3682

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

Grade Levels: 10-13+

24 minutes

BENCHMARK MEDIA 1998

DESCRIPTION

Poet Tobias Hill examines the poetry of William Wordsworth as he treks in the Lake District of England, Wordsworth's home. Hill dialogs with others about what influenced Wordsworth and what kind of poet he was. Notes his poetry is concerned with nature, humans, and society. Excerpts from "The Rainbow," "The Prelude," "Lucy Gray," and others illustrate some of his themes. Addresses Wordsworth's poetry, not his life.

INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS

1. To understand how closely the poetry of Wordsworth is derived from his own life experiences, and the natural landscape of his native Lake District in northwest England.
2. To appreciate how his creative imagination interprets what he has experienced.
3. To enjoy how the rhythms and language of his poetry are suitable to amplify and transform the subjects of his poetry.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Born in 1770, William Wordsworth remembered his childhood as a happy one, particularly his school days at Hawkshead. However, with the death of his parents while a teenager, he felt a loss of innocence, and an awareness of hardship and unhappiness. During his undergraduate days at St. John's College, Cambridge, he took strenuous walking tours through France, Switzerland, and later, Germany. The ideals of liberty and brotherhood of the French Revolution, then in progress when he was there, became his. Consequently, he came to hate inherited rank and wealth. At a critical time in his youth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge became his neighbor, friend, and supporter. Apart from some tours abroad, Wordsworth remained in the Lake District of northwest England, which he dearly loved, from age 43 until his death at 80. One of England's greatest Romantic poets, the poetry of Wordsworth is deeply concerned with nature, humans, and human society as perceived through his creative imagination. His autobiographical epic poem "The Prelude," written over 7 years as 13 books, later revised to 14, is basically about the loss of a childhood paradise, the gain of maturity and insight, and the growth of a poet's mind.

SUMMARY

The program includes extracts from poems read by an offscreen actor, with accompanying visual images, from: The Rainbow, The Prelude (1851), Lucy Gray, The Leech-gatherer from Resolution and Independence, and The River Duddon.

There are also four brief comments by people on particular aspects of his poetry: Kathleen Jones, author of *The Passionate Sisterhood: the Sisters, Wives and Daughters of the Lake Poets*; Hunter Davies, author of a recent biography of Wordsworth; Dr. Seamus Perry, a Wordsworth specialist who teaches at Oxford University; and George Kirkby, gardener and chief guide at Dove Cottage, Wordsworth's home between 1799 and 1808.

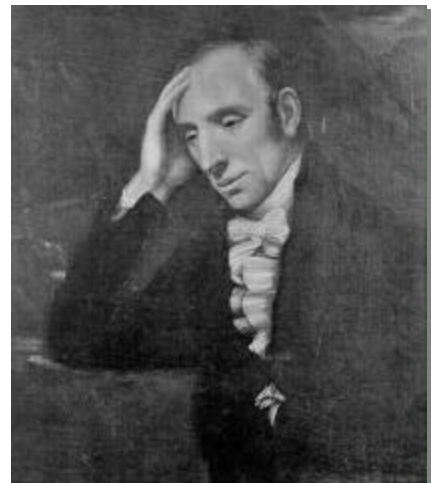
As on-camera host, a young modern poet, Tobias Hill, walks through the Lake District while talking about the landscape and its influence on Wordsworth, and exploring the inspiration, themes and background of his poetry. Wordsworth's prime source of inspiration, Hill says, was the Lake District landscape transmuted by his imagination.

Extract "Moods of my Own Mind" from poem *The Rainbow*. This introduces the links between childhood experience and adult response. Tobias Hill visits the grammar school at Hawkshead where Wordsworth was a student. He sits at Wordsworth's desk and points out the beautifully written "Wordsworth" the poet himself had carved in the wood. Extract "spots of time" from *The Prelude* (1799). A recurring theme throughout *The Prelude* is the idea of "spots of time"--childhood experiences that profoundly affected Wordsworth. Tobias Hill introduces a second extract from *The Prelude*, which conveys "a real sense of the fear and the power and the beauty, and sometimes even the guilt and the unease of his experiences in this landscape."

Extract "the theft of a boat, and Wordsworth's experiences on the lake" from *The Prelude*. The program then explores one of these "spots of time" from *The Prelude*. The poem is read over a visual representation of the experience, with images of oars, a boat gliding through water, crags, light and darkness. In this extract, Wordsworth explored the way in which the power of his imagination, fueled by fear and guilt, changed Nature from a benevolent friend to a dark and terrifying force. He was left with "grave and serious thought." Tobias Hill is then himself shown rowing on the lake, talking about the rhythms of the poetry and rowing.

Extract "Furness Abbey" from *The Prelude*. The imagery and powerful description of this extract are explored: the surrounding sounds and the impact of "this amazing ruin." Tobias Hill expresses his empathy with Wordsworth, as he visits the Abbey and walks "in his shoes." He then walks with Kathleen Jones, who talks about Wordsworth as the radical democrat whose ideas were considered treasonable at the time. As he walks with Hunter Davies, Wordsworth's ascetic lifestyle is discussed. He is described as a man who "lived in nature," this being "reflected in his poetry and in his life."

Extract "The world is too much with us" from *The Prelude*. In this extract Wordsworth bemoans the way in which mankind has lost its affinity with the natural world: a very modern concern! "We are out of tune, it moves us not." In the Lyrical



Ballads, Wordsworth reveals his interest in the outcast, the poor and the solitary. Using such characters as subjects for poetry was revolutionary and received poor reviews. Lucy Gray a touching visualization of the poem, shows Lucy's tragic disappearance, and her parents fruitless search. This is the perception of a girl as dearly loved and idealized; and the transience of youth and innocence. Tobias Hill talks about Wordsworth's compassion for ordinary people and their deep connection with the land.

Extract "the Leech-gatherer" from Resolution and Independence. The encounter is between Wordsworth and a poor old man gathering leeches, whom he describes in stately terms which clothe him in dignity; a decrepit but courageous man, a man who is in tune with the rhythm of nature, and therefore at peace, despite being on the edge of society. Tobias Hill meets Dr. Seamus Perry, who points out the unique way Wordsworth deals with an ordinary event (meeting a leech gatherer), not thought then as a fit subject for poetry, and allows his imagination to use this "unpromising material" and transform it. George Kirkby introduces Daffodils by pointing out that Wordsworth was not simply a Nature poet, but one who is concerned about the effect of the Nature on the mind of man. Daffodils (the "People's Poem") is performed by members of the public at Dove Cottage who each deliver a separate line. The program ends with River Duddon. This extract encapsulates all the themes and ideas in Wordsworth's poetry: the eternal qualities of Nature as opposed to the temporal ones mankind, and the possibility of being "greater than we know"—the beauty of the human spirit.

RELATED RESOURCES



Captioned Media Program

- Robert Frost #3651
- Sylvia Plath #3668

World Wide Web



The following Web sites complement the contents of this guide; they were selected by professionals who have experience in teaching deaf and hard of hearing students. Every effort was made to select accurate, educationally relevant, and "kid-safe" sites. However, teachers should preview them before use. The U.S. Department of Education, the National Association of the Deaf, and the Captioned Media Program do not endorse the sites and are not responsible for their content.

- **THE LAKE DISTRICT**

<http://website.lineone.net/~beautifulengland/lakes.htm>

Images from the Lake District of England.

- **THE WORDSWORTH CIRCLE**

<http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/english/journal/wordsworth/index.html>

Online connections to Wordsworth's works, and contemporary works published in this journal.