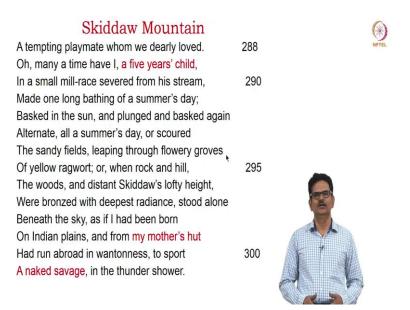
## Poetry Professor. S. P. Dhanavel Department of Humanities and Social Sciences Indian Institute of Technology, Madras Lecture 35 William Wordsworth- 2

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A key landmark of this lake district is the number of lakes plus some hills, and dales, rivers around this area. Wordsworth along with his friends used to walk around all these places and feel happy about the company of nature. So here in this passage, apart from looking at his response to river Derwent, we also see how he played in the landscape called Skiddaw Mountain.

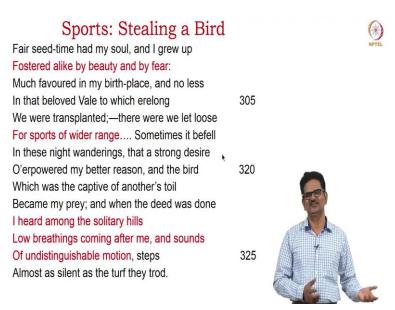
Let us begin our reading.

A tempting playmate whom we dearly loved.	288
Oh, many a time have I, a five years' child	
In a small mill race severed from his stream,	290
Made one long bathing of a summer's day.	
Basked in the sun, and plunge and basked again,	

Alternate on a summer's day, or scouredThe sandy fields, leaping through flowery grovesOf yellow ragwort, or when rock can hill.295The woods, and distant Skiddaw's lofty height,295Were bronzed with deepest radiance, stood alone400Beneath the sky, as if I had been born on Indian plains,300And from my mother's hut300A Naked savage, in the thunder shower."300

Wordsworth feels as if he was in naked savage, in his play with nature's lap. So, we can find that, he has been moving around from his mother's hut to different places in and around his house, and he enjoys the company of nature as a child.

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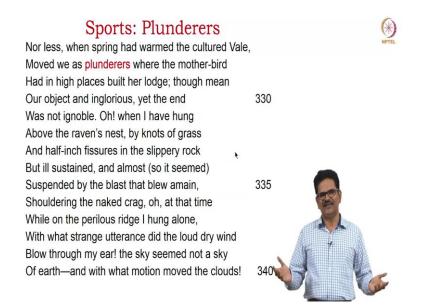


Wordsworth plays, not only plays with the water, or with plants or with the locations around him, he also plays spoiling sport with birds and other small animals. So here we have the beginning of this outdoor game.

> "Fair seed-time had my soul, and I grew up Fostered alike by beauty and by fear. Much favoured in my birth place, and no less In that beloved vale to which erelong 305 We were transplanted; there were we let loose For sports of wider range...Sometimes it befell In these night wanderings, that a strong desire Overpowered my better reason, and the bird 320 Which was the captive of another's toil Became my prey. And when the deed was done, I heard among the solitary hills Low breathings coming after me, and sounds Of undistinguishable motion, steps 325 Almost as silent as the turf they trod."

We understand Wordsworth's responds to nature in this passage in much more detail, as we can see he wanted to learn something more about the natural surroundings. So, some kind of temptation he had to go around and steal the eggs from birds, and he felt unhappy about it because he heard among the solitary hills, low breathings coming after me and sounds of undistinguishable motion, probably to warn him that this was something wrong that he should not do. That is why we have this idea of fostering a like by beauty and by fear. Nature has both beauty and fear. However, Wordsworth more often focuses on the beautiful benign side of nature.

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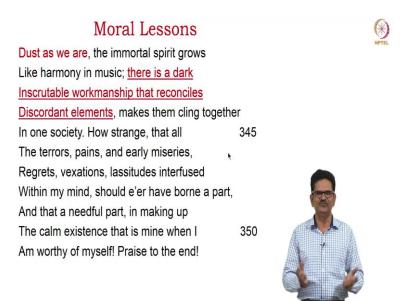
This outdoor game continues, not only just stealing from a bird's, a capti bird's eggs, here he does something more, he almost plunders, that is why, he uses the word plunder here:

"Nor less, when spring had warmed the cultured Vale,
Moved we as plunderers where the mother-bird
Had in high places built her lodge; though mean
Our object and inglorious, yet the end
330
Was not ignoble. Oh! when I have hung
Above the raven's nest, by knots of grass
And half- inch fissures in the slippery rock.
But ill sustained, and almost (so it seemed)

Suspended by the blast that blew amain,335Shouldering the naked crag, Oh, at that time,While on the perilous ridge I hung alone,With what strange utterance did the loud dry windBlow through my ear! The sky seemed not a skyOf earth-and with what motion moved the clouds!"340

We find Wordsworth hanging from a crag, being warned by the rushing wind and thought how nature would care for him during his act of plundering. The major lesson is very clear to us. Wordsworth is doing something which he ought not to do, but some for some pleasure he does it and so he learns out of this experience. 'I hung alone,' and there he learns a lot from, through this hanging alone.

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The lessons are codified in a few lines here, so we call it Moral Lessons:

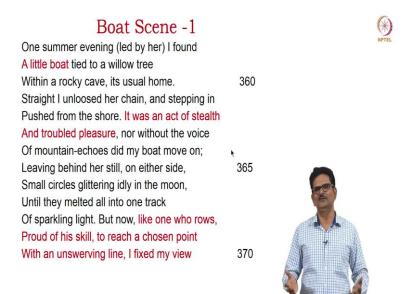
"Dust as we are, the immortal spirit grows

Like harmony in music; there is a dark

Inscrutable workmanship that reconciles Discordant elements, make them cling together In one society. How strange, that all 345 The terrors, pains, and early miseries, Regrets, vexations, lassitudes interfused Within my mind, should e'er have borne a part. And that a needful part, in making up The calm existence that is mine when I 350 Am worthy of myself! Praise to the end!"

As we said earlier, the moral lessons are beautiful brought up here within these few lines. Dust as we are, is the reference to the Bible, understanding that, we are all from the dust and we go back to the dust. And Wordsworth tells very clearly, there is a dark, inscrutable workmanship that reconciles discordant elements. And we can notice, how this passage reflects Coleridge's very definition of imagination and poetry, as reconcilement of opposites or discordant qualities, both beauty and fear, we have reconciled in this lesson from nature for Wordsworth.

#### (Refer Slide Time: 06:43)



One of the most important scenes in prelude book 1 is this boat scene. We have three passages here, so we call it boats scene 1 and we will see how Wordsworth while rowing the boat in a lake alone, what he learns, we will understand.

One summer evening, (led by her) I found A little boat tied to a willow tree, Within a rocky cave, its usual home. 360 Straight I unloosed her chain, and stepping in Pushed from the shore. It was an act of stealth And trouble the pleasure, nor without the voice Of mountain echoes did my boat move on, Leaving behind her still, on either side, 365 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." 370

()

Taking the boat from the usual place, he moves on, he rows and he has fixed his eye on one particular place. And then will let us see, how he feels about this troubled pleasure and act of stealth. Wordsworth is aware of it, he is stealing, he is plundering, he is doing something morally wrong; he knows but he has some pleasure and he shares that pleasure with us.

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Boat Scene - 2 Upon the summit of a craggy ridge, The horizon's utmost boundary; far above Was nothing but the stars and the grey sky. She was an elfin pinnace; lustily I dipped my oars into the silent lake, 375 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, 380 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,

Here is boat scene 2.

Upon the summit of a craggy ridge,

The horizon's utmost boundary; far above

Was nothing but the stars and the grey sky.

She was an elfin pinnace; lustily

I dipped my oars into the silent lake. 375 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, 380 Upreared its head. I struck and stuck again, And growing still in stature, the grim shape Towered up between me and the stars, and still.

As we can see, Wordsworth is moving up towards his fixed point that is a craggy ridge. But he we learned that he has been responding to the natural caution or warning from the surrounding.

#### (Refer Slide Time: 09:08)

## Boat Scene - 3

For so it seemed, with purpose of its own And measured motion like a living thing, 385 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, int grave 390 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 395 Or blank desertion.

90 95 (\*)

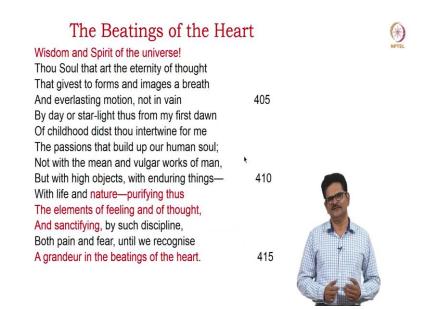
Now let us see boat scene 3.

"For so it seemed, with purpose of its own	
And measured motion like a living thing,	385
Strode after me. With trembling oars I turned,	
And through the silent water stole my way	
Back to the cover of the willow tree.	
There in her morning- place I left my bark,-	
And through the meadows homeward went, in grave	390
And serious mood. But after I had seen	
That spectacle, for many days, my brain	
Worked with a dim an undetermined sense	
Of unknown modes of being; o'er my thoughts	

Or blank desertion."

Wordsworth understanding from nature, through these unknown modes of being is something excellent, something great. That is why Wordsworth has always been a source of inspiration for us. He shares with us some of the feelings we may have had ourselves when we stole something from others, or did something without the knowledge of others. So, he always thinks about this feeling of being alone, rowing the boat, in that particular location.

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We continue with this lesson. We call it Beatings of the Heart, which teach him some valuable lesson;

## "Wisdom and spirit of the universe!

Thou soul that art the eternity of thought

That givest to forms and images a breath

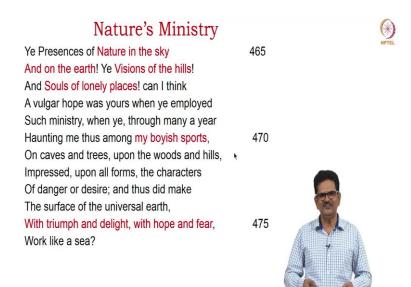
And everlasting motion, not in vain

405

By day or starlight thus from my first dawnOf childhood didst thou intertwine for me.The passions that build up our human soul,Not with the mean and vulgar works of man,But with high objects, with enduring things-410With the life and nature. Purifying thusThe elements of feeling and of thought,And sanctifying, by such discipline,Both pain and fear, until we recogniseA grandeur in the beatings of the heart."415

In response to natural surroundings, and also our own actions, we learn something from the beatings of our own heart, Wordsworth calls it a grandeur in the beatings of the heart. These beatings have a purifying effect on Wordsworth and probably, we also have such a feeling in us from the caution or warning notes of nature. So, he learns wisdom and spirit from nature.

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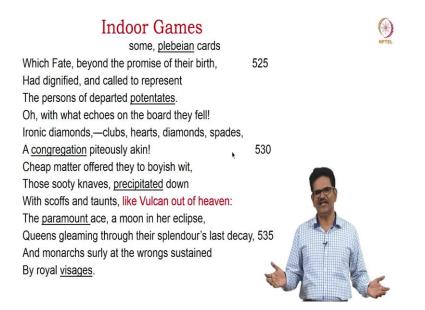
Now, Wordsworth specifically attributes the quality of ministry, that is special care taken by nature to train him in understanding life.

"Ye presence of nature in the sky,	465
And on the earth! Ye visions of the hills!	
And souls of lonely places! Can I think	
A vulgar hope was yours when ye employed	
Such ministry, when ye, though many a year	
Haunting me thus among my boyish sports,	470
On caves and trees, upon the woods and hills,	
Impressed, upon all forms, the characters	
Of danger or desire. And thus, did make	
The surface of the universal earth,	
With triumph and delight, with hope and fear,	475

#### Work like a sea?"

As you can see, the whole passage is in one question, he asks a question indicating the kind of lessons that he learns from the Ministry of Nature, the teaching of nature, from triumph and delight, from hope and fear. He is learning all about life. It, he compares his natural surroundings with the tempest of the sea, where we have this hope and fear of reaching the shore.

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Apart from the outdoor games, Wordsworth also played some indoor games. Here we have an example of a game of cards.

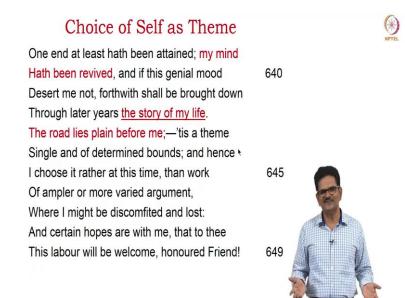
"Some, <u>plebeian</u> cards	
Which fate, beyond the promise of their birth,	525
Had dignified, and called to represent	
The persons of departed potentates.	
Oh, with what echoes on the board they fell!	
Ironic diamonds- clubs, hearts, diamonds, spades.	

A congregation piteously akin!530Cheap matter offered they to boyish wit,Those sooty knaves, precipitated downWith scoffs and taunts, like Vulcan out of heaven.The paramount ace, a moon in her Eclipse,535Queens gleaming through their splendour's last decay,535And monarchs surly at the wrongs sustained

By royal <u>visages.</u>"

In these card games, have certain pictures like this, clubs, hearts, diamond, spades and he calls them, a congregation piteously akin. And we have underlined certain words, plebeian, potentates, congregation, precipitated, paramount, even visages to reveal the fact that Wordsworth was not following his own rule of using the common language. These are Latinate words, words of Greek origin, which have a high diction which may not be suitable for a common rustic boy, but Wordsworth is using these words. Probably in his lifetime he understood, as he was editing and revising his poem, he found that certain words would be more appropriate here and he has used them. And through these games he learned something from life, about his own path in his life.

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After all these outdoor games and indoor games and the lessons that he has learned from nature, he specifies the theme that he has to deal with in this poem called the prelude.

"On one end at least hath been attained; my mind
Hath been revived. And if this genial mood
Desert me not, forthwith shall be brought down
Through later years the story of my life.
The road lies plain before me;- 'its a theme
Single and of determined bounds; and hence
I choose it rather at this time, than work
Of ampler or more varied argument,
Where I might be discomfited and lost.
And certain hopes are with me, that to thee
This labour will be welcome, honoured friend!"

That friend is, of course, Coleridge. Wordsworth has finally settled down on the story of my life, that is his own life for this theme, for the theme of his poem, this epic poem to his friend Coleridge. The road lies plain before him, that is also an echo from Milton's Paradise Lost, this we have mentioned as an allusion.

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Thematic Contrast			
Child and Adult	Concord and Discord		
Radiance and Dullness	<ul> <li>Fearless and Fearful</li> </ul>		
Savage and Civilized	<ul> <li>Feeling and Thought</li> </ul>		
Soul and Body	<ul> <li>Kindness and Hatred</li> </ul>		
Joy and Sadness	Presence and Absence		
Solitary and Communal	Danger and Safety		
Motion and Stillness	Beauty and Ugliness		
Nature and Culture	Memory and Oblivion		
Immortality & Mortality	Attainment and Fail		

We can see a number of contrasts, thematically. Child and adult; this poem is written by the adult, remembering his past childhood, nostalgically. Radiance and dullness, savage and civilized, soul and body, joy and sadness, solitary and communal, motion and stillness, nature and culture, immortality and mortality, concord and discard, fearless and fearful, feeling and thought, kindness and hatred, presence and absence.

As we can see the whole poem is about presence and absence, whatever is absent he is making present in his poem, his mother, his past experiences everything he makes present to us. Danger and safety, beauty and ugliness, memory and oblivion, attainment and failure. Specifically, Wordsworth talks about this choice of theme for his achievement, which might not give him discomfort and lead to failure. He wants to ensure success in writing his epic.

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## Poetic Devices

- Hyperbaton: there were we let loose (306)
- Allusion: Dust as we are (341); Bible
- Apostrophe: Wisdom and Spirit of the universe!
- Assonance: The leafless trees and every icy crag (442)
- Onomatopoeia: Tinkled like iron (443)
- Simile: Pull at her rein like an impetuous courser (497)
- Simile: Bliss ... like a tempest (585-86)
- Alliteration: With fond and feeble tongue a tedious tale (622)
- Allusion: The road lies plain before me. (643)
   reference to Milton's Paradise Lost



(\*)

There are a number of poetic devices we can see in this poem, particularly in these selected passages. One example for hyperbaton that we have is, 'there were we let loose,' in 306. This can be rewritten as 'we were let loose there.' The allusion we discussed earlier is, 'dust as we are,' this has a biblical reference to mean that human beings are from the earth and they go back to the earth.

Apostrophe is common here, he addresses his friend and also wisdom and spirit of the universe, something abstract, but he addresses as if wisdom is there in front of him. Assonance we have an example here, 'the leafless trees and every icy crag.' Onomatopoeia also we have here in this example, 'tinkle like iron,' in line number 443. The sound we can hear. Simile, is found in this line from 497. 'Pull at her rein like an impetuous courser,' Courser is a swift horse or a bird. In this case, actually, Wordsworth also played with his friends took a horse and went into the forest, into the woods and had some games. We have simile in 'bliss... like a tempest,' in line numbers 585 and 86.

Alliteration we have in line number 622, 'with fond and feeble tongue, a tedious tale,' two examples F sound and T sound we have in this line. Again, the last one is allusion to Milton's Paradise Lost, Milton's Paradise Lost ends with the two characters; human characters, Adam and Eve going out of the paradise going into the earth. So, they see the

road before them to the earth. Similarly, Wordsworth is able to see the road ahead of him to compete his epic.

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# Rhyme, Rhythm, and Meter

Blank verse: Unrhymed iambic pentameter Alliteration: (627) May spur me on, in manhood now mature Assonance and Alliteration: 637-638 And almost make remotest infancy A visible scene, on which the sun is shining? Caesura, Enjambment and End-stop lines: 481-484 We were | a noi | sy crew; | the sun | in heaven Beheld | not vales | more beau | tiful | than ours; Nor saw | a band | in ha | ppiness | and joy Richer, | or wor | thier of | the ground | they trod.



(\*)

We have rhyme scheme, rhythm and meter and all that here. In the case of rhyme scheme, we have to understand that this poem is written in blank verse, so it is unrhymed iambic pentameter. Alliteration, one more example we have here, 'May spur me on, in manhood now mature,' m sound is repeatedly use. There we can see this sound, these two, alliteration and assonance they are called figures of sound, so we can say some rhyming effect through repetition of sounds happens here.

For assonance and alliteration, we have, 'And almost make remotest infancy, a visible scene on which the sun is shining?' Scene, sun, shining, we have visible the 'sa' sound is found in this line. Earlier also we have 'sa' sound, almost sun. Next, we have the example for caesura, that is a pause, Enjambment; continuation of line from previous line to the next line and end stop lines, that is the line stopping at the end.

And we have given cantion, this is iambic pentameter.

"We were a noisy crew that sun in heaven

Behold not vales more beautiful than ours.

Nor saw a band in happiness and joy,

Richer or worthier or of the ground they trod."

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# **Overall Impression**

- Wordsworth perceives nature, e.g. River, Lake, as a playmate as well as a mentor teaching him and his friends lessons in living joyfully and communally.
- Stealing, plundering and using others' things do come with pleasure and moral instructions, shaping the poet to grow from an innocent child to a wise man.
- The poet is able to feel and articulate the rhythm of nature thus: "A grandeur in the beatings of the heart," which gives peace and harmony to him.
- The indoor games too provide pleasure to children and shape their sensibility in appreciating beauty.
- With the renewed spirit, Wordsworth decides to write a poem on "the story of my life" for Coleridge.



On the whole, we can have an impression as follows. Wordsworth perceives nature, that is river, lake, everything around him as a playmate, as well as a mentor, teaching him and his friends lessons in living joyfully and communally. Stealing, plundering and using things of others do come with pleasure, and more instructions also come to him to shape the poet to grow from an innocent child to a wise man.

The poet is able to feel and articulate the rhythm of nature. Thus, in a memorable line like this, 'a grandeur in the beatings of the heart,' which gives peace and harmony to him. The indoor games to provide pleasure to children and shape their sensibility appreciating the game of life. With the renewed spirit, Wordsworth decides to write a poem, that is a epic poem on the story of his own life for his friend Coleridge.

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# An Epic Poem

- Invocation: Prayer to the gentle breeze (1)
- Statement of Theme: the story of my life (642)
- Epic Simile: William Wallace like a wild flower
- Supernaturalism: River, Hill, Lake, (Nature)
- In medias res: the poet's escape from London
- Descent to Hell/ Journey/ Quest:
   Wordsworth explores Mind and Nature
- Heroic Characters: Wordsworth and Coleridge, Nature
- Books: 14



(\*)

We can consider this poem an epic poem. These are certain features that we normally find in an epic, invocation, statement of theme, epic simile, supernaturalism, in medias res, descend to hell, our journey, our quest, heroic characters, and books; the whole point being divided into number of books. In the case of invocation, we see that Wordsworth is praying to the gentle breeze to inspire him to write this poem. Whole of nature actually becomes an inspiration for Wordsworth.

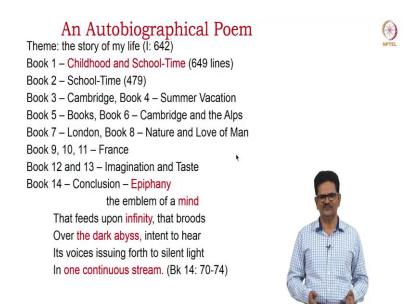
He states, the theme of his poem as his own story, the story of my life. We find some epic similes in this poem, one memorable epic simile, we saw is this, William Wallace, the knight, who fought for the freedom of Scotland. His name and fame spread like wild flower, to the entire country, everywhere. His name was flowering, and people are able to remember William Wallace, for his act of bravery and heroism in bringing freedom, independence to Scottish people. Then we have this supernaturalism in the sense of these rivers, hills, lakes, all other things, taking on certain shapes, to caution Wordsworth to learn certain lessons in which is right, which is wrong, which is good, which is not good.

Then we have this in medias res, the poem begins suddenly, it does not have any kind of beginning, it just starts, Wordsworth starts his journey from one place to another, that is to Grasmere, actually he has escaped from London, from this oppressive feeling he has escaped, that is where he feels a sense of freedom. And then we do not have anything like

descent to hell, but we have a journey or a quest, quest for a great achievement in English poetry. So, we have this quest or journey, as Wordsworth explores nature and also his own mind to come up with a poem for his friend.

The heroic characters, or as we have noted, three; one is Wordsworth that is a main hero, and his friend is equally though absent, equally a great hero. And these two are great poets in England, or in English poetry, as you know. And nature is the most heroic character that we have in Wordsworth's almost all poems. And these books have been divided into 14 books. The whole of the Prelude has been divided into 14 books, something like cantos we have, to get a shape of this epic poem.

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This is certainly an autobiographical poem as it deals with the life of Wordsworth, all the events that happened in his life or he met with whatever experience he had in different locations. In book 1 and 2, we have his own childhood and school time experiences. And in book 3, his education in Cambridge, and in book 4 his summer vacation, in book 5, all his readings. And then in book 6, his experience in Cambridge and his journey to the Alps. And in book 7, he talks about his life in London. And in book 8, in general, he talks about nature and the love of man. We have to understand that Wordsworth was fascinated by the revolutionary spirit of France, so he visited France. And so, we have three books dealing with his experience in France. Book 12, and 13 deal with imagination and taste in

general. And the last book is a conclusion where we have an epiphany. There we have a few lines Lets read them now:

"The emblem of a mind That feeds upon infinity, that broods Over the dark abyss, intent to hear Its voices issuing forth to silent light, In one continuous stream,"

That one continuous stream of light, stream of water, stream of river, stream of knowledge, stream of experience, is what we find in Wordsworth being connected with the rest of humanity, the whole of universe. Therefore, we can consider this poem an autobiographical poem.

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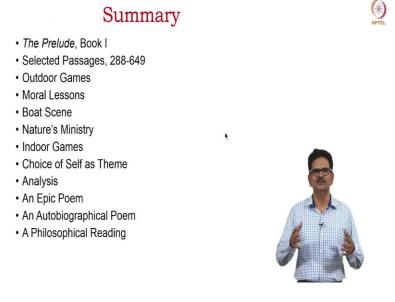
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A Philosophical Reading, Bk 1 & 2 Mook (2006)

- Wordsworth starts writing about ordinary events of his life but finds no serious purpose behind them initially but then he discovers a purpose in course of time.
- Nature teaches him the value of the everyday and helps him find the childhood teleology – the pursuit of nature for nature's sake like a scientist to understand human beings and natural phenomena.

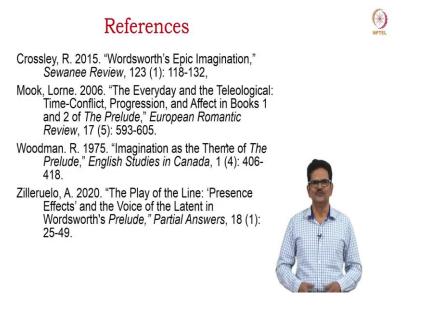
We have an interesting case of a philosophical reading by one critic called Mook. According to Mook, Wordsworth starts writing about ordinary events of his life, but finds no serious purpose behind them initially, but then, he discovers a purpose in course of time as he discusses, as he explores, he finds some meaning at the end. Nature teaches him the value of the everyday and helps him find the childhood teleology- the pursuit of nature for nature sake, like a scientist, to understand human beings and natural phenomena. We have to remember that Wordsworth wanted actually poets to learn something from science and contribute to more knowledge of human beings. So, Wordsworth himself does this in his own poem, to understand nature and also human beings.

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In summary, we can say that the Prelude, book 1 is an autobiographical poem. We have discussed the selected passages dealing with outdoor games, indoor games, where we have boat scene and moral lessons. We have to note that, nature has this specific aim of educating Wordsworth. It is not just the entertainment; nature educates Wordsworth and we participate in that education.

At the end, we find that Wordsworth is able to choose a theme for his poetry, his epic. And we find that this is an epic poem, where we find some autobiographical elements with certain philosophical bent. Because what is ordinary becomes extraordinary. Whatever Wordsworth explores, gives him some grand theme to write his own epic in English. (Refer Slide Time: 28:32)



Some references are here, if you like you can read at least one or two, particularly the one on, "The Everyday and the Teleological Time Conflict," this will be useful for all of you. Thank you.