

A Peasant

- by R. S. Thomas -

Background information

R. S. Thomas said that 'A Peasant' was the first of his poems about Iago Prytherch, his 'symbol of the hill farmer'.

The Poetry Archive: <http://www.poetryarchive.org/poet/r-s-thomas>

Activities

A

A way in to the poem. If learners do not know that the poet was a priest, teachers can decide the appropriate time to ask them to speculate on his relationship with the farmer, or simply tell them.

B

The farmer is very much referred to in the third person. This activity can help to emphasize the potential impact/surprise of the switch from third to second person.

C

As always, the 'naming of parts' is just the start. Learners should be encouraged to explore the **specific elements** of the comparison which are most relevant in conveying the nature of the landscape and/or the character.

D

A definition of 'nicety' such as 'an elegant or refined feature' (*New Penguin Dictionary*) may be helpful, especially as it links to 'refined' in the poem. One important point raised here is that R. S. Thomas recognises that some aspect of his background or character may contribute to any tension with his parishioners. For a discussion on 'refined' and 'affected' see:

<https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=406uBwAAQBAJ&pg=PA43&lpg=PA43&dq=affected+refined+sense&source=bl&ots=uayh4n-sZE&sig=gByxcJNOFDNo-WaUe-g2Zjvto7s&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiNn5ip8rjKAhXMvBQKHeycD-IQ6AEIlzAA#v=onepage&q=affected%20refined%20sense&f=false>

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E

This activity can be used as part of an ongoing discussion into the complex relationship between the poet and 'Iago Prytherch':

Iago Prytherch, the descendant from the Celtic Welsh people, preserves real Welshness deep in himself. He is also a symbol for Wales, the kingdom under rule from England for a long time. The poet wished for the revival of Wales as a kingdom throughout his life, and believed Prytherch should 'be/ The first man of the new community.' ('Iago Prytherch' ('Ah, Iago, my friend ...')).

Who/What is Iago? <http://www.cymru2008.com/rst/whprytherch.html>

F

Perhaps it is only when this activity is carried out that learners will begin to appreciate the carefully interwoven structure of the poem. Hearing it aloud before and after the activity could well be worthwhile.

G

For a definition of the word 'peasant', see for example:
<http://dictionary.reverso.net/english-definition/peasant%20farmer>