The short story "B. Wordsworth" (by V. S. Naipaul) is a coming-of-age story about a young boy who encounters a "stranger caller" at the home of his mother. The stranger asks to watch the bees that inhabit the palm trees in the yard. The stranger "[speaks] very slowly, as though every word was costing him money." The man is a self-avowed poet and tells the boy that he is writing "the greatest poem in the world," at a rate of one line per month.

The shared appreciation between the boy and the man is their affinity for poetry, or, more broadly, personal observation. The man tells the boy that the boy, too, is a poet (though the narrator gives us no explicit reason for the stranger's conclusion). The boy and the stranger become friends, and, on one occasion, the poet/stranger waits for the boy after school on the corner of the street. He invites the boy to come to his yard and eat mangoes (which angers the boy's mother, when he arrives home late).

The poet and the boy share another formative experience, lying on the grass and looking up at the sky. The poet encourages the boy to "think about how far those stars are from us." The narrator reports that he "had never felt so big and great in all [his] life." The poet teaches the boy to appreciate nature and its bounty (i.e., fruit, grass, stars). The poet also tells the boy an oblique story of a relationship between "boy poet" and "girl poet," who died "with a young poet inside her." The narrator interprets this to be autobiographical.

The end of the story reveals the aging poet telling the boy that his poem is not going well. On his deathbed, he offers to tell the boy a "funny story" and announces that the story about the boy poet and girl poet was untrue, as well as the claim that he had been writing "the greatest poem in the world." The narrator "ran home crying, like a poet, for everything [he] saw." He reports visiting the home of the poet many years later and finding that it has been destroyed and replaced.

Despite the grand deception employed by the poet, the boy concedes through his narration that indeed he learned from the poet to cry and to see. The subtext of the poet's ruse is that being a poet is, independent of writing poetry, a lifestyle. For reasons once unknown to the boy, the poet claimed an affinity with him and, in so doing, convinced the boy of his own unique poetic sensibility. The stranger/poet, though deceptive and inscrutable, is a catalyst for the boy's coming of age. He teaches him to embrace his emotion and powers of observation.