



Garnet's Gold Discussion Guide

Director: Ed Perkins

Year: 2014

Time: 75 min.

You might know this director from:

GARNET'S GOLD is the first full-length feature from this director.

FILM SUMMARY

"I hope he finds something, whatever it is. If it's not gold, it's his heart's desire." In such simple words, Garnet Frost's 90-year-old mother summed up the mission of her son, a man who has spent his life in search of the perfection of gold, taking the road of the romantic and finding himself by the wayside time and again. A man who embraces the inherent adventure in life, an adventure we are invited to join him on in GARNET'S GOLD.

Over the course of four years, director Ed Perkins trailed Garnet Frost and his whimsical, sometimes flippant, other times melancholic existence. From his mother's bedside to his hopeful lover's piano side, Garnet weaves a playful, outlandish, haphazard trail through the unpredictable playground of London. However itching within him is a longing to return to the stream in the Scottish Highlands where he nearly lost his life 20 years previously, a place he is convinced houses a cache of hidden gold.

As GARNET'S GOLD unravels, the screen is filled with the poetics of nature's simplicity, a meditative dance full of gentle suspense and tender truths. Perkins hands the mic to silence, playing the antics of the protagonist against the incredulous statements of pure nature. What is a dewdrop on a leaf, if not a pedestal for the sun's reflection? What is a man, if not a dream's unhinged channel to realization? From the Big Smoke of London to the virgin meadows of the Highlands, Frost and Perkins manifest the human struggle to self on screen.

As Garnet stares out at the beauty of the Highlands at the tale's tail end, he calls out, "My my, what a pleasure. Thank you world." Though the golden gift takes no physical form at the end of his journey, Garnet's mother can rest assured that her son did indeed locate his own internal treasure chest. As we, the viewer, can easily thank Perkins for such a beautiful telling of the human trial towards self-truth.

FILM THEMES

EXPECTATION AND DISAPPOINTMENT

Garnet was a man who expected a lot, both from others and himself, never able to fully settle in to any one thing or person, never able to devote himself to anything wholeheartedly until he set out for the Highlands, sacred staff in hand. Convinced that life was more than what he had seen so far, Garnet wore his convictions out in the open. Expectation's evil twin, its partner in the waltz of life, is disappointment, which was never far from Garnet's door. Having set himself up to fall by setting the stage in his mind rather than through his actions and expecting colossal returns from others but never providing the same, disappointments became all Garnet could really expect.

OBSESSION

Deemed a romantic idealist by his close friends, Garnet lived his life driven by his obsessions. A man married to his dreams, Garnet built his life around his mind's musings. But what can be said about the director? With little to no funding and uncertain of what the story line was for much of the filming, Perkins too was a man devoting countless hours over the course of four years to capturing Frost's comings and goings, trailing him as he tended to his ailing mother, propped up near the bar as he sang into the night air, learning of his hopes and disappointments. With no set markers along the story's path, no concrete happenings, it took two obsessively fervent men to paint such a crystalline portrait of the honest beauty of the human struggle.

FAMILY

Whether it be a loving partner or a needy parent, family constitutes the lion's share of existence for most everyone, playing a leading role in the theater of life. Family can press down on us, relying on us to keep them afloat, as with Garnet and his mother, who turns to him in her failing health. Embattled by conflicting emotions, Garnet goes so far as to say, "Why don't you just die?" But no sooner does he wish to drop the yoke of his mother than does he request her financial assistance for his latest scheme. So too does the lack of a life partner play as dominant a feature as the presence of one. "There's this part of me that wants to be in love. It's part of my nature." No matter how much we try to escape family and intimacy, no sooner does it reveal its indispensability.

SYMBOLS

Just as Frost took the recovered staff from Loch Arkaig and carried it in his heart for 20 years, harboring imaginary images of the secrets it contained and the gold it concealed, so too did Perkins search for the symbolism in the London landscape, the Highland hilltops. By taking Frost the man and placing him before the camera's eye, Perkins sculpted a lyrical ode to life and humanity via the personal intimate tale of one man's honest, open-eyed meanderings. Through the use of age-old symbols (baptism, the tempest, the ascension), Perkins adds a richness and depth to a story otherwise lacking in conventional, concrete happenings. The tale of GARNET'S GOLD is made all the more meaningful through both Garnet and Frost's adherence to imagery and symbols.

"We're not supposed to be afraid of death. I am."

Garnet Frost

"Gold isn't just stuff that you find in the ground or in a box marked X on a map. Your life consists a lot of the time in thinking about the past and your place in it, the friends you had. You gather up fragments of gold from those - gold dust."

Garnet Frost's mother

FILM FACTS:

- GARNET'S GOLD had its premiere at the 2014 Tribeca Film Festival, where it was nominated for the Best Documentary Feature Award.
- Although GARNET'S GOLD is director Ed Perkins first feature-length film, he has worked on a number of film projects in the past, including developing and directing a series for National Geographic and directing the behind-the-scenes for films such as "Searching for Sugarman," "Project Nim," and "The Imposter."
- The film's soundtrack was composed by J. Ralph, an American composer and producer who has provided music for many highly-esteemed documentaries, including "Man on Wire," "The Cove," "Chasing Ice," and "Finding Vivian Maier," as well as writing the film's final song, which is performed by Liza Minnelli and Wynton Marsalis.
- Ed Perkins spent 4 years collecting the material that became GARNET'S GOLD, and for most of the time did it with no funding. Perkins came across Frost after a friend of Perkins' overheard Frost explaining his plan to travel to Scotland to search for gold in a London pub. After the two met, Garnet explained his idea to reenact the story of Bonnie Prince Charlie in the Highlands, with a number of actors dressing up in period clothing. Perkins felt there was more of an interesting story in the true details of Frost's life.
- After initially filming Garnet with a full film crew, Frost filmed the rest of the footage on his own.
- Serving as a more historical regional definition than carrying strict geographical borders, the Scottish Highlands loosely extend north from an imaginary line between Dundee and Greenock. The highest mountain in the British Isles - Ben Nevis - is located in the Highlands. This region is very sparsely populated, with 9.1 people per square kilometer, making the population density of the Highlands comparable to Russia, Chad, and Bolivia. The Highlands were originally differentiated from the Lowlands on a linguistic basis, as Gaelic was spoken in the Highlands.
- With 13 million inhabitants in its metropolitan area, London is a far cry from the Highlands, boasting the second-largest urban area in the European Union (after Paris). There are around 5,354 residents per square kilometer, and although English is the official language, around 300 other languages are spoken in the city. Spreading north and south from the banks of the River Thames, London can date its history back over 2,000 years to Roman times.
- Charles Edward Stuart, commonly known as Bonnie Prince Charlie or The Young Pretender, was the second Jacobite pretender to the thrones of Scotland, Ireland, and England. Stuart was born in 1720 in Rome, where he was raised.
- The treasure of Loch Arkaig was buried in 1746.
- According to local legend, Loch Arkaig was once home to a mythical water horse creature.

WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. **Share** this film. Give other the chance to learn from it and be enveloped by the Scottish landscape.
2. **Find** out more about director [Ed Perkins'](#) past projects, and support him in his future work.
3. **Learn** more about the sometimes daunting task of caring for an elderly relative. [Aging Care](#) offers a wealth of information and helpful links for all those involved in this difficult role reversal.
4. **Learn** more about [Scotland's National Nature Reserves](#) that works to maintain the pristine Scottish outdoors.
5. **Give** voice to your internal dreamer by embarking on your own personal quest for gold, wherever it may take you.

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