

A Critical Analysis of Nature Depicted in “I wandered Lonely as a Cloud” by William Wordsworth

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ABSTRACT

William Wordsworth is noteworthy as a Romantic Poet and a Nature poet as well. He changed the parameters of poetry writing. His exploration is candid as well as vivid. His poetry is full of Nature. He has remarkably fulfilled his desire of Nature as a literary element. The elements of Nature he has touched upon are the unique even today.

Keywords: *Depiction, Nature, Romantic, Scenic; Wandered.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Wordsworth was walking around through the hills and valleys, a depiction of Nature, but he felt all lonely and mopey. Suddenly, as he passed a lake, he noticed a big group of yellow daffodils waving in the breeze. This wasn't just some scattered patch of daffodils. We're talking thousands and thousands around this particular bay and the flowers were dancing. Yes, the daffodils danced, and so did the waves of the lake. But the daffodils danced better. The speaker's loneliness was replaced by joy, but he didn't even realize what a gift he has received until later. Now, whenever he's feeling kind of blah, he just thinks of the daffodils, and his heart is happily dancing.

II. THE SCENIC BEAUTY

The speaker describes how he walked around and felt as lonely as a cloud. He doesn't say, "Walked around," but uses the much more descriptive word "wandered." It simply means roaming around without a purpose, like when you explore something. In its metaphorical use, "wandered" can mean feeling purposeless and directionless in general.

Are clouds lonely? Well, maybe the ones that float about valleys ("vales") and hills are lonely. It's more likely, the speaker is projecting his own loneliness on the clouds. But that still doesn't explain the strange image, because clouds usually travel in groups. Maybe a cloud is lonely because it is so far above the rest of the world. Its thoughts are just so "lofty," and maybe the speaker's thoughts are, too. Also, the cloud could be lonely because it floats over a natural landscape with no people in it. Maybe the speaker has thought of hills and valleys because he happens to be "wandering" through such a landscape. These are some of the questions we're hoping the poem will help us sort out after this mysterious beginning.

Suddenly, the speaker sees a group of daffodil flowers. We tend to think of daffodils as "yellow", but he uses the more majestic-sounding "golden." He calls them a "crowd," so they must be packed tightly together. Then he elaborates on "crowd" by adding the noun "host." A host is just a big group. Yes, "host" and "crowd" mean

pretty much the same thing. Ah, but that's where the connotations come in, those vague associations that attach to certain words. A "crowd" is associated with groups of people, while "host" is associated with angels, because people often refer to a "host of angels." Coupled with the description of their angelic "golden" color, we seem to be dealing with some very special daffodils.

He sees the daffodils beside a lake and underneath some trees. It's a breezy day, and the flowers "flutter" and "dance" on their stems. Maybe now is a good time to step outside the poem for just a second to note that Wordsworth lived in a part of England known as the Lake District, which is filled with lots of hills, valleys and, of course, lakes. We can assume he's walking in a fairly remote and wild part of the countryside. "Fluttering" suggests flight, which could bring us back to the angels or even birds or butterflies. "Dancing" is something that usually only humans do. The daffodils are given the qualities of humans and also of some kind of otherworldly creatures, perhaps.

He emphasizes the point that there are a whole lot of daffodils. More daffodils than he has probably ever seen before. After all, these are flowers that usually grow in scattered groups in the wild or in people's well-tended gardens. The flowers stretch "continuously," without a break, like the stars in the Milky Way galaxy, each one gleaming like a star. The comparison to stars provides new evidence that the speaker is trying to make us think of angels or other heavenly beings.

Like the Milky Way galaxy, the flowers are roughly concentrated in a line that seems to stretch as far as the eye can see ("never-ending"). They flowers line the shore ("margin") of a bay of the lake, which must be a relatively large lake. If you've ever seen the Milky Way (or the photo in the link above), you know that the galaxy appears to be a band that has more stars and a brighter appearance than the night sky around it. It's not a perfectly clear line, but more like a fuzzy approximation of a line. We imagine the same effect with the flowers. It's not as if there are no flowers outside the shore of the lake, but most are concentrated on the shore.

The speaker takes in "ten thousand" dancing flowers at once. That's a lot of daffodils. Wow, he's fast at counting if he knows the number after only a quick glance. But, of course, the speaker is not actually counting, but just guessing. (It's like when you try to guess the number of gumballs in a jar.) The flowers "toss their hands" while dancing to the wind. By "heads" we think he means the part of the flower with the petals, the weight of which causes the rest of the flower to bob. "Sprightly" means happily or merrily. The word derives from "sprite," which refers to the playful little spirits that people once thought inhabited nature. "Sprites" are supernatural beings, almost like fairies.

The waves also dance in the breeze, but the daffodils seem happier than the waves. We know from Dorothy Wordsworth's journal (see "In a Nutshell") that the day that inspired this poem was a stormy one, so the waves on this medium-to-large sized lake must have been larger than usual. Maybe they were even cresting into whitecaps. The point is that the entire scene has suddenly been invested with a joyful human-like presence. Since waves do not bring as much joy as the yellow flowers, the flowers "out-did" the water with their happiness. The waves "sparkle," which creates yet another association with the stars. Everything seems to be gleaming and twinkling and shining and sparkling.

Despite his earlier loneliness, the speaker now can't help but feel happy, or "gay," with such a beautiful vision to look at. He hangs out with the Nature. The flowers and waves feel like companions to him. The repetition of "gaze" tells us that he kept looking at the flowers for a long time. It's as if the speaker enjoys looking at these

daffodils at the time, but doesn't realize exactly how great of a gift he has just received with this vision. Apparently, the speaker doesn't think that he fully appreciated the vision at the time. This is a bit odd, because he seems to be really enjoying those daffodils. The word "wealth" expresses a more permanent kind of happiness. It also carries a hint of money that does not quite fit with the supernatural language that has come before.

Now the speaker explains why the daffodils were such a great gift to him. He moves suddenly into the future, back from the lake and the windy day. He's describing a habitual action, something he does often. First, he sets the scene: he often sits on his couch, kind of feeling blah about life, with no great thoughts and sights. Sometimes his mind is empty and "vacant," like a bored teenager sitting on the sofa after school and trying to decide what to do. At other times he feels "pensive," which means he thinks kind-of-sad thoughts. You can't be both "vacant" and "pensive" because one means "not thinking," and the other means "thinking while feeling blue." But he groups the two experiences together because both are vaguely unpleasant and dissatisfying.

So, often when our speaker gets in these downer moods, the image of the daffodils "flashes" through his mind. The "inward eye" expresses what Wordsworth felt to be a deeper, truer spiritual vision. A person cannot share his or her own spiritual vision completely with others, and so it is a form of "solitude." But its truth and beauty make it "blissful." Why does the speaker think of daffodils in exactly these moments? Maybe it's because the contrast between their joy and his unhappiness is so striking. Nonetheless, the vision is spontaneous, like a crack of lightning.

When the memory of the flowers and the lake flashes into his head, he feels happy again. It's almost like the same experience he had while "wandering" through nature at the beginning of the poem, when the real daffodils pushed the loneliness out of his head. The memory of the daffodils is as good as the real thing. His heart is set to dancing, just like the flowers. He dances along "with" them – they are his cheerful companions once again.

III. SOME VIEWS

A. Symbols, Imagery, Wordplay

It is the land of symbols, imagery, and wordplay.

a) The Daffodils (Dance, Dance Revolution)

In "I wandered lonely as a Cloud," the daffodils are like little yellow people who keep the speaker company when he is feeling lonely. The happiness of the daffodils can always cheer him up, and he can tell that they are happy because they dance. Some variation of the word "dance" occurs in each of the four stanzas. Also, the speaker is taken aback by how many daffodils there are. We often think of daffodils as a flower that people plant in their gardens in the springtime, so it would be surprising to come upon thousands of them by an isolated lake.

Lines 3-4: The daffodils are personified as a crowd of people. This personification will continue throughout the poem.

Lines 6: Daffodils cannot actually "dance," so Wordsworth is ascribing to them an action that is associated with people.

Line 9: The speaker says that the line of daffodils is "never-ending," but we know this can't be strictly true: all good things come to an end. This is an example of hyperbole, or exaggeration.

Lines 12: The personification of the daffodils becomes more specific. The "heads" of the daffodils are the part of the flower with the petals. It is larger and heavier than the stem, and so it bobs in a breeze. (When you think about it, it's kind of amazing how flowers support themselves at all.)

Lines 13-14: The waves also get in on some of the dancing (and personification) action, but the daffodils are not to be out-done – they are happier than the waves.

Lines 21-24: Wordsworth imagines the daffodils in his spiritual vision, for which he uses the metaphor of an "inward eye." His heart dances like a person, too.

b. Clouds, Sky, and Heavens

"I wandered lonely as a Cloud" has the remote, otherworldly atmosphere that is suggested by the title. The speaker feels like a cloud, distant and separated from the world below. But this distance becomes a good thing when he comes upon the daffodils, which are like little stars. It's as if the problem at the beginning is that he hasn't ascended high enough.

Lines 1-2: The beginning of the poem makes a simile between the speaker's wandering and the "lonely" distant movements of a single cloud. Clouds can't be lonely, so we have another example of personification.

Lines 7-8: The second stanza begins with a simile comparing the shape and number of the daffodils to the band of stars that we call the Milky Way galaxy.

c. Angels and Spirits

You have to read into the poem a bit, but we think that Wordsworth is definitely trying to associate the flowers with angelic or heavenly beings. Maybe he was thinking of Dante's *Paradiso* from *The Divine Comedy*, in which all the angels and blessed souls of heaven form a big flower. However, Wordsworth is a more naturalistic (i.e., strictly realistic) poet than Dante, and so the imagery of angels is extremely subtle.

Line 4: You may have heard the phrase, "heavenly host" in reference to angels or spirits. We think Wordsworth adds the word "host" in order to suggest this connection. Also, the color of the flowers is golden like a halo.

Line 10: Stars are associated with angels, too, so the simile comparing the flowers to "twinkling" stars reinforces the connection.

Line 12: The word "sprightly" is derived from the word "sprite," meaning a local spirit, almost like a fairy.

B. Form and Meter

It has a fairly simple form that fits its simple and folksy theme and language. It consists of four stanzas with six lines each, for a total of 24 lines. The rhyme scheme is also simple: ABABCC. The last two lines of each stanza rhyme like the end of a Shakespeare sonnet, so each stanza feels independent and self-sufficient. This is called a "rhyming couplet." There aren't even any slant rhymes to trick you. Here's the first stanza with the rhyme scheme labeled:

I wandered lonely as a Cloud (A)
 That floats on high o'er vales and Hills, (B)
 When all at once I saw a crowd, (A)
 A host, of golden Daffodils; (B)
 Beside the Lake, beneath the trees, (C)
 Fluttering and dancing in the breeze. (C)

The meter is iambic tetrameter, which just means that each line has four ("tetra") iambs. An iamb is a short, unaccented syllable followed by a longer, accented syllable. Below is an example. We broke up each of the iambs and put the accented syllables in bold font.

I wan|dered lone|ly as | a cloud

That floats | on high | o'er vales | and hills.

The meter is regular and consistent, especially compared to many of Wordsworth's other poems, which have a more conversational sound. All in all, the poem is as tidy and orderly [1].

C. The Speaker

The speaker is a lonely poet who has learned how to keep himself company by viewing nature as "peopled" by things. The first two lines make him sound almost like the cliché of a Romantic poet: his sensitive and intelligent nature puts him so far above everyone and everything else that he can't help but feel a noble loneliness. He lives in a rural area and likes to take long walks by himself, which isn't exactly the best cure for loneliness. Fortunately, the speaker doesn't stay in this funk for long. He has a vibrant imagination, and can create the effect of having people around him without actually having people around him.

We know that the speaker is a poet because he tells us so in line 15. He speaks in the third person, but we know he's talking about himself. Also, we have the sense that this poet takes nature to be almost a religion, and he brings intense focus and attention with his "gaze" on nature. He also has an "inward," spiritual eye that seems more powerful (or at least equally powerful) than his regular vision.

D. The Setting

The poem begins with a single, solitary cloud floating slowly over the English countryside. You don't often see one cloud off by itself, but that seems to be the case here. The cloud is like a lost child wandering in through a shopping mall: "Would the mother of the lonely cloud please come claim her child!" The cloud floats over a part of the countryside with hills and valleys, so this is not flat farmland. If we were going to bring in Wordsworth's biography into the mix, we'd say that this is the famous Lake District where the poet lived much of his life. But we're not going to do that, so we'll just call it some kind of region (a district, perhaps?) with lakes. You should feel free to come up with your own setting for the poem. Where do you picture the speaker catching this vision of never-ending daffodils?

The main body of the poem is dedicated to the image of the daffodils. They are stretched in a line around the bay of a lake, bordered by the water on one side and trees on the other. The day is windy enough to create waves on the lake, and to make the flowers bob up and down in concert.

At the end of the poem, the setting shifts indoors, to the speaker's couch, where he sits bored and staring off into space. We're made to understand that this happens quite frequently. Then we go inside the speaker's head and see the same image of the dancing daffodils in his spiritual vision, followed the image of his dancing heart.

i. Sound Check

Comparing poetry and dancing is a very old tradition. In Ancient Greece, "lyric" poetry was often performed with music played on a lyre, an instrument like a harp.

ii. About the Title

When you read the title as "I wandered lonely as a Cloud," you might have done a double take. That's because many people know the poem as "Daffodils," or "The Daffodils."

iii. Calling Card- A Romantic Element

One of the big ideas of Romanticism is the notion that the spiritual vision – the imagination – can hold greater truths than those given by our senses. We can never fully express what goes on in our mind and we never perceive what really the Nature is.

iv. Tough-o-Meter

(2) Sea Level One of Wordsworth's big innovations in poetry was to write, as he said in his preface of his Lyrical Ballads, in the "real language of Men," and about "incidents and situations".

E. Themes

a. Happiness

"I wandered lonely as a Cloud" is a poem that just makes you feel good about life. It says that even when you are by yourself and lonely and missing your friends, you can use your imagination to figure out life in you through Nature.

b. Man and the Natural World

Wordsworth is the granddaddy of all nature poets, and he's in top form in "I wandered lonely as a Cloud." In her journal entry about the day in question, Wordsworth's sister Dorothy wrote about their surprise at finding so many daffodils in such a strange place, next to a lake and under some trees. "How'd those get there?" She wondered, even guessing that maybe the seeds floated across the lake. The event is one of the minor miracles that nature produces all the time, as anyone who has seen the documentary Planet Earth or the Disney movie Earth knows. Wordsworth's nature is full of life and vitality. He appreciates its wildness and unpredictability, but he humanizes the landscape and fits it to his own mind.

c. Spirituality

The 19th century Scottish writer Thomas Carlyle coined the phrase "natural supernaturalism," which has been used by later critics to describe how the Romantic poets, and especially Wordsworth, viewed naturalism as an aspect of poetry.

d. Memory and the Past

"I wandered lonely as a Cloud" is almost like a simpler version of "Tintern Abbey," one of Wordsworth's other most famous works. In both poems, the memory of beautiful things serves as a comfort to live in present [2].

IV. CONCLUSION

Among all the Nature poets available worldwide William Wordsworth is famous for his deft touch. He has the capacity to arouse feelings in others and compel the reader to accompany him. It is his exceptional skill that creates the Natural picture in front of our mind's eye. The poem is full of beautiful imagery which compels us to be with Nature.

REFERENCES

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