

Lecture Fourteen: A Study of William Wordsworth's The Daffodils

*Lesson Plan

- 1-Introduction
- 2-Biography of William Wordsworth
- 3-The poem Analysis
- 4-Evaluation

*Lesson Objectives: by the end of the lesson, students will be able to

- To analyze Wordsworth's use of figurative language providing the main figures of speech.
- To summarize the central theme of the daffodils in few sentences
- To explore Wordsworth's use of poetic devices to affect the theme, tone and structure.
- To study the rhythm, rhyme then scan few lines from the poem.
- To evaluate the moral or didactic message of the poem

*Keywords

Poem analysis, The Daffodils, William Wordsworth, Romanticism, Biography

The Daffodils

by William Wordsworth (1770-1850)

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
The thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance

The waves beside them danced; but they
Outdid the sparkling waves in glee:
A poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company:
I gazed and gazed but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

1-Introduction

The poem was inspired when Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy came across a sight of beautiful daffodils on 15 April 1802, during their visits to the Lake District. It was written in 1804, according to Wordsworth's own account, and after Dorothy's journal entry describing the walk. Mary Moorman has pointed out the important influence of Dorothy on his brother's poetry (1965, 27 and 96-7). Wordsworth and his sister, Dorothy, moved to a cottage at Grasmere in 1799. After Wordsworth married in 1802, the family continued to live there until 1813. When we were in the woods beyond Gowbarrow park we saw a few daffodils close to the water side, we fancied that the lake had floated the seed ashore and that the little colony had so sprung up – But as we went along there were more and yet more and at last under the boughs of the trees, we saw that there was a long belt of them along the shore, about the breadth of a country turnpike road.

I never saw daffodils so beautiful they grew among the mossy stones about and about them, some rested their heads upon these stones as on a pillow for weariness and the rest tossed and reeled and danced and seemed as if they verily laughed with the wind that blew upon them over the Lake, they looked so gay ever dancing ever changing. This wind blew directly over the lake to them. There was here and there a little knot and a few stragglers a few yards higher up but they were so few as not to disturb the simplicity and unity and life of that one busy highway – We rested again and again. The Bays were stormy and we heard the waves at different distances and in the middle of the water like the Sea.

2-Biography of William Wordsworth

William Wordsworth (1770-1850) wrote beautiful poetry filled with sweet imagery, usually based around the natural world. Often Wordsworth's poems contained slight somber undertones, as is the case in this poem, as we will explore shortly. This is possible due to the conflict in Wordsworth's life and his battle with depression. Some scholars suggest that

Wordsworth's relationship with his sister, Dorothy was far from platonic. But Wordsworth did marry and lived with both his wife and sister.

Wordsworth lived through the French Revolution, which he initially supported and later rebuked. He, along with his close friend and fellow poet, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, was the pioneer of the romantic era of poetry, and his earlier romantic poems were widely derided as a result of this. He was also the poet laureate for Queen Victoria for seven years.

Wordsworth's reputation rests heavily on the collection "Lyrical Ballads" that he published along with Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1798, which includes Coleridge's groundbreaking poems like 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' and 'Lines Written in Early Spring.'

3-The Poem Analysis

a-Structure and division

Published in 1807 in *Poems in Two Volumes*, a volume that was poorly reviewed by Wordsworth's contemporaries including Lord Byron, the poem is now taught in many schools in the English-speaking world. The poem contains four stanzas of six lines each. In each stanza, the first line rhymes with the third and the second with the fourth. The stanza then ends with a rhyming couplet. Wordsworth unifies the content of the poem by focusing the first three stanzas on the experience at the lake and the last stanza on the memory of that experience.

The four six-line stanzas of this poem follow a quatrain-couplet rhyme scheme ababcc: Each line is metered in iambic tetrameter. In the first stanza, line 6 appears to veer from the metrical format. However, Wordsworth likely intended fluttering to be read as two syllables (flut' RING) instead of three so that the line maintains iambic tetrameter. The poem makes use of 'Enjambment' which converts the poem into a continuous flow of expressions without a pause

b-Content and Themes

Nature beauty uplifts the human spirit. People sometimes fail to appreciate nature despite the inherent unity between man and nature characteristic of the Romantic period (human emotions inspired by nature are neglected due to our busy lives). Nature thrives unattended.

Reminder of the arrival of the spring season, when the field is full of daffodils; the flowers symbolize the joys and happiness of life.

The daffodils proliferate in splendour along the shore of the lake without the need for human attention. Loneliness (The feeling of loneliness was marked by the death of his brother John). The power of memory to freeze time (in solitude, when his mind is unrestrained by disturbing elements of the real world, he revives the memories of the daffodils. Daffodils is not ephemeral but rather permanent and everlasting.

c-Language and Figures of Speech

-Alliteration: lonely as a cloud (line 1). high o'er vales and Hills (line 2). Beside the Lake, beneath the trees, ...

-Simile: Comparison (using as) of the speaker's seclusion to that of a cloud (line 1).

-Personification: Comparison of the cloud to a lonely human. (line 1)

-Metaphor: Comparison of daffodils to a crowd of people (lines 3-4).

-Hyperbole (Exaggeration): ten thousand at a glance...

d-Rhyme Scheme and Poetic voice

The poem is composed of four stanzas of six lines each. It is an adherent to the quatrain-couplet rhyme scheme, ABABCC. Every line conforms to iambic tetrameter. The poem 'Daffodils' works within the ABABCC rhyme scheme as it uses consistent rhyming to invoke nature at each stanza's end. Moreover, it helps in creating imagery skilfully as the poet originally intended. The poem flows akin to a planned song in a rhythmic structure. Consonance and alliteration are used to create rhymes.

This poem is written from the first-person point of view. Therefore it is an ideal example of a lyric poem. The poetic persona is none other than Wordsworth himself. This piece contains a regular meter. There are eight syllables per line, and the stress falls on the second syllable of each foot. There are four iambs in each line. Thus the poem is in iambic tetrameter. For example, let's have a look at the metrical scheme of the first line:

I wan-/dered lone-/ly as/ a cloud

e-Tone and Mood

The tone of this poem, 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud', is emotive, hyperbolic, expressive, and thoughtful. In the first stanza, the speaker's tone helps readers understand how he felt after seeing the daffodils on a specific event. As the poem progresses, Wordsworth intensifies it. Thus it appears hyperbolic. In the last stanza, he chooses a thoughtful tone for describing the impact of the scene on his mind. The tone also follows the mood of the poem. Throughout the text, the poet maintains a calm and joyous mood. It is like the breeze that made the daffodils dance on that day. While going through the poem, readers can feel this relaxing mood.

f-Symbolism

The poem begins with a symbolic reference to the cloud. It is wandering and lonely. The poetic persona is the embodiment of such a cloud. Hence, it symbolizes being lonely and thoughtless. This state is achieved when one is free from mundane thoughts.

The most important symbol of this piece is the daffodils. The narcissistic description of the flower seems to be alluding to the Greek myth. Apart from that, the daffodil acts as a symbol of rejuvenation and pure joy. Wordsworth becomes the means through which the flowers express their vibrance. In his pensive mood, they become a means for the poet's self-reflection.

g-Summary

The speaker, likely William Wordsworth himself, is wandering down the hills and valley when he stumbled upon a beautiful field of daffodils. The speaker is transfixed by the daffodils seemingly waving, fluttering, and dancing along the waterside. Albeit, the lake's waves moved as fervently, but the beauty of daffodils outdid with flying colours. The poet feels immensely gleeful and chirpy at this mesmerizing natural sight. Amongst the company of flowers, he remains transfixed at those daffodils wavering with full vigour. Oblivious to the poet is the fact that this wondrous scenery of daffodils brings the poet immense blithe and joy when he's in a tense mood or perplexed for that matter. His heart breaths a new life and gives him exponential happiness at sight worth a thousand words.

Though the poem's title hints at a cloud, it is not the subject of the poem. Instead, it is about a group of golden daffodils dancing beside the lake and beneath the trees. Wordsworth's poetic persona, at some point, visited that spot, and he is describing how he felt having the sight of those beautiful flowers. The poet metaphorically compares him to a cloud for describing his thoughtless mental state on that day. Like a cloud, he was wandering in the valley aimlessly. The sudden spark that the daffodils gave to his creative spirit is expressed in this poem.

4-Evaluation

a-Short Test

-Reread the poem then write **True** or **False** next to each statement. Correct the false statements.

1. The speaker compares himself to a cloud wandering alone in the sky.
2. The daffodils are described as growing in a garden behind the poet's house.
3. The flowers are portrayed as moving and dancing in the breeze.
4. The lake beside the daffodils is calm and motionless.
5. The poet suggests that the memory of the daffodils brings him comfort when he feels lonely.
6. The poem emphasizes imagination and memory as important sources of joy.
7. The tone of the poem is predominantly gloomy and melancholic.
8. The daffodils outnumber the stars in the Milky Way, according to the speaker's hyperbolic comparison.
9. The poem reflects central characteristics of Romanticism, including a deep appreciation of nature.
10. The experience described in the poem has no lasting emotional impact on the speaker.

b-Global Task

-What is the message of 'Daffodils'?

-Why is 'Daffodils' a Romantic poem?

-How does the poet's use of sound influence the poem's mood?