

The woodspurge poem analysis

[Literature](#), [Poem](#)



The wind flapped loose, the wind was still,
Shaken out dead from tree and hill;
I had walked on at the wind's will –

I sat now, for the wind was still.

Between my knees my forehead was –
My lips, drawn in, said not Alas!
My hair was over in the grass,
My naked ears heard the day pass.

My eyes, wide open, had the run
Of some ten weeds to fix upon;
Among those few out of the sun,
The woodspurge flowered, three cups in one.

From perfect grief there need not be

Wisdom or even memory;

One thing then learnt remains to me –

The woodspurge has a cup of three.

Illustration

This poem took place in hill where the trees are shaken out by the wind and a field of grass where the man in this poet saw woodspurge as one of the ten weeds and grieving for his problem all day along as the wind blown. The poet described a visual imagery by points out what that man can see while grieving in field, such as in ninth and tenth line : “ My eyes, wide open, had the run”

“ Of some ten weeds to fix upon;”

The tactile imagery also can be found in seventh line “ My hair was over in the grass” the touch’s feel can be sensed when his hair is over the grass as he put his head to rest on it. Kinesthetic imagery, this motion happened when the man bent his head on to between his knees until his forehead touch those knees in fifth line, shows a grieving gesture.

The word “ wind” in first stanza is a metaphore from a word “ spirit” or more likely a “ determination”, the wind itself got a personification in third line, where the poet wrote “ I had walked on at the wind’s will –.” By stating that a wind could have a will like a people. Ironically, this man seems lack of determination, he only move to somewhere as the wind guide him and stopped when the wind is gone.

General Meaning

It is about a man that covered with sadness and he seems lack of resolve, his body only move as the wind blows to somewhere else, until he found a bloomed woodspurge that makes him at ease.

Detailed Meaning

Before we going more deeper in detailed meaning, it might be wise to review the trivia fact about Dante’s poem especially The Woodspurge. This poem were made approximately between 1828 – 1882, the period where Victorian’s were arisen. Meanwhile, in the year 1848, there was a movement by a group named “ Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood” and Dante was also one of the founder of this group.

The group's intention is none other than to reject social-political theme in literary works and this group also established Aestheticism movement, in the meaning of aestheticism " as early as 1750, when the German philosopher, Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, in his *Aesthetica*, used it to identify a separate branch of philosophy. He transformed the original Greek usage of the word, applied to things perceived by the senses, into criticism of taste concerned exclusively with beauty." (Denney 38). So, their's intention was to make a literary works become more " aesthetic" by reject the social-political theme.

Due to its a poem full with aesthetic aspects, let's evaluate it from top to bottom. " The wind flapped loose, the wind was still," with such words for an opening in first line, we can considered it is truly a sentence with aestheticism's beauty. Why so? It said that the wind flapped loose, those words " flapped" and " loose" are contradicts for each other. Flapped means flutter, throb or thrashing which means it is conducted with so much power, on the other hand, the word loose means not tight, unconstrained and relaxed.

A powerful wind with relaxed feeling, it made the readers will feel the peculiar sensation by read it in matched tone, then it said that the wind was still. Wind, however, is a moving air and Dante wrote the wind with capability to stand still, it just bring the imagination to the whole new level and violates the wind's law for suited to stagnate. It is still acceptable in literary works and we can admire more the nature by imagining something that nature are not competent to, though.

“ Shaken out dead from tree and hill;” for the second line, it might have a denotation like this; the winds shaken out dead from tree and hill. This may have a meaning that the winds able to cleanse the ‘ dead’ from tree and hill because shaken out have a meaning uncluttered, to cleanse and the word ‘ dead’ might a metaphor from sadness, anguish or misery. And the wind can simply took the sorrow out of the tree, still, the wind only remove it and the melancholic trait that has been cleansed, may outgrowth again sometimes because its humane for it to happens. There is also potency that tree might a metaphor for a man but, in the next line, the poet already talked about it so this hypothesis could not fully-accurately correct.

“ I had walked on at the wind’s will -“ the third line is about a man that always seems walk as the wind’s guidance. There is also an old proverb that said “ only dead fish follow the stream” which is matched with the inner meaning in the third line. By not having a spirit of independency, this man chose to follow the path that the wind makes for him. But, what makes this man would did such a not-manly act? It should have a relation with a word in previous line, “ dead”. The poet used the word “ dead” to emphasize the next line’s meaning or this line’s, it is an anguish that made the man paralyzed, not able doing something by himself. “ I sat now, for the wind was still.”

At least, in the fourth line, this man stopped because the same thing also happened to the wind, it become stagnate just like in the first line’s point. The man do nothing but sit, seems waiting for another wind to guide him again. If we stop too in this line, we can see the voidness in the man’s mind, he would be daydreaming or blank-staring his surrounding. This emptiness of

his mind has lead to something that might be crucial and it is a lack of faith. If a faithful person even without resolve in his heart, experiencing the same condition, he might pray to his God instead of daydreaming and asking for His guidance to overcome this stranded plight. Overall, the first stanza was merely an intro for the next stanzas, obviously.

By completely talking about the setting of place in first stanza that were a hill with trees and gust of relaxing wind, it is included as somewhat parts of aestheticism. The first reason, of course, it was not social-political themed stanza, the next reason is everything can be shifted with aesthetic element and “ in aesthetic forms, cruelty becomes imagination: Something is excised from the living, from the body language, from tones, from visual experience.” (Adorno 68).

Everything in each stanza in this poem have relation with Adorno’s opinion about aesthetic forms, for instance, in the first stanza it is about a man that grieving and let the winds dictates him, however it is just an imagination that comes from cruelty. It will be far more cruel if there were man that actually looks like in this poem. And the another aspect in Adorno’s opinion will be discussed later on. “ Between my knees my forehead was –My lips, drawn in, said not Alas!
My hair was over in the grass, My naked ears heard the day pass.” (5th – 8th line)

The second stanza have a repetition of words “ my”, the possession form of ‘ me’ and ‘ I’. Besides of granting this poem with aestheticism by doing those repetition, there is also another meaning behind it. The poet intends to fill the second stanza with “ ego” because “ my” in this case representing an

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ego, a personality. Though, the second stanza mostly illustrate the man's body language, how he faced the void that he experienced. It cover up the fourth line's hypothesis, that the man is not doing nothing at all, he make a motion to uncover his agony by doing this and that. " Between my knees my forehead was -" this line depicts his current position, he bent his body forward and place his head on his knees till his forehead touched it.

That gesture shows him in an awful state of mind and insecure feelings, he might be grieving for his mistakes in the past or others problem that he has in his life. Moreover, this gesture was commonly known to express the deep suffering of mind and usually followed by tears that overflowing from the eyes, however, he did not cry at all. In matter of fact, he is a man and it is weird for even a man to cry for whatever the burden that he bear because in those time, the patriarchal era, it is a time where the man always described as tough being and crying is for a women. So, even he has a big problem, he would not cry no matter what the problem is.

" My lips, drawn in, said not Alas!" in sixth line, it can be judged how big his misery is. Even a word can not describe it, his lips drawn in means he does not even have a force to speak any words, yet, he want to yell " Alas!" for blowing off the steam but that word were not even match with his pain. Looks like his anger would multiplied for not being able to cried it outloud, still we can see him as a man with full of patience for being able to surpress his anger over his misery. " My hair was over in the grass," in the seventh line is representation of anti-climax if we assume that the sixth line was a climax. In this line, it can be implied that he finally lie his body over the grass till the poet depicts it with his hair was over on the grass. It can be also

stated that this man was already in stage of acceptance for lying his body over the grass, it seems he already accept the truth or the cruelty in his life.

“ My naked ears heard the day pass” by lying around after sitting with full of misery in the previous line, the eighth line define that the day has passed casually. In this line too, the poet combined two things that will not relate to each other yet he succeed to make it become one, Dante clarified that ears can heard the sound of the day pass by. It is weird to even imagining how the day pass’s sound, though. Nevertheless, Dante prevailed to make impression to the reader that it might have a peaceful or calm sound because it is the first time in this poem he describe the audible situation. Dante did not put any weird sound before, and yet the man in this poem heard something, so, it should be the sound of the tranquility. “ My eyes, wide open, had the run Of some ten weeds to fix upon;” (9th - 10th line)

Unlike the previous lines that analyzed one by one, the ninth and tenth line have to be evaluated as one wholeness because it seems to connected yet separated as different line, this poem were written in iambic tetrameter anyway, and it would ruin the artistic part of the poem if those line were in one line. Thus, the man eyes widely open and he saw ten weeds near him, there is no special metaphor linked with these lines. Even so, this is also the first time in this poem for the man to pay attention to his surrounding with his own very eyes.

The previous panorama or landscape that described by the poet in preceding line were merely the poet’s imagery, not the man’s visual imagery. It is as well as the Adorno’s opinion previously, aestheticism can be reached by showing a visual experience, now the man had his eyes widely open and saw

ten various weeds, which is nice. It also means that the field were full with green-coloured scenery due to all those weeds, green is categorized as bright colour which is can also means ahappiness, merry, just like spring's scape. Although, he finally notice his surrounding, in no matter of time, he quickly noticed that there were ten kind of weed based in his vision. Is he a botanist? Or nature lovers? For immediately knowing there were ten different plant may be his brief assumption, but that is not the point in here, right? The truly case were located in next line and these lines were just an intro to lead this points in there. " Among those few out of the sun, The woodspurge flowered, three cups in one." (11st - 12nd line)

The eleventh line implied the situation is happened in daytime for sun lightened those plants on the field. If we paid more attention, the third stanza were less with grieving content, everything gradually become more serene. No more sadness, no more wistful part in this stanza because the man just back to his senses, previously, he just a hollow-vessel with nothing to struggle for. Finally, he noticed his surrounding and even the smallest detail like the ten weeds, although he only noticed the woodspurge for the most, a plant with " All parts are highly toxic by ingestion; sap may irritate skin and eyes." (" Plant Selector").

Euphorbia amygdaloides var. *Robbiae* is the another name for woodspurge, and it is unique for having three cups in one. Usually, " The mature flowers take a Single form, with an approximate petal count of 2" (" Plant Database"). So, it is rare occasion for found a three-petal woodspurge, In addition, a clover plants mostly have three petals and myths said that clover with four-leaves will bring a luckiness to the person who found it. Thus, what

is the meaning behind from found a three-petals woodspurge? Will they bring fortune to whoever found it? Well, I rest my case for this aside and some professional said “ the flower reminds us of the central mystery of Christianity: the Holy Trinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; the Trinity that breaks the rule of fate.” (Nield). And how it can related to aestheticism?

As a commoner, I put simply the metaphor of woodspurge is a faith in God. It all makes sense, at the first, he wander aimlessly seeking for nothing as the wind guides him until he stopped in peculiar area where he found a three-petals woodspurge that makes him in ease. Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, however, have a goal to make literary works become more aesthetic, more religious and have more connection with nature to confront Victorian's literary works that full with socio-political, overly-scientific literary works which made the people's faith fade away deliberately. “ From perfect grief there need not be

Wisdom or even memory;” (13rd - 14th line)

Again, these lines have to consider as one unity, and it have a deepful meaning in this part. The poet chose the word “ perfect” to make the readers feel the absolute depression that the man had, it is not for asking a pitiness to the man, it is about sending a ‘ message’. After that man saw a woodspurge, his mind became soften then he learnt something “ you will got nothing from grief, not even wisdom or even memory.”

Which means there is no value for being blue over something, and its said that not even a sad memory will retain in mind, something that started with tragedy or bad things will certainly ended with tragedy too. It is true, though, and every one would not keep something bitter in their head for a long time.

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Somebody might choose to erase or pretend for bad incident that have occurred instead of mourning it endlessly because in the end those memories will be washed away for sure. "One thing then learnt remains to me -

The woodspurge has a cup of three." (15th - 16th line)

In this last two lines, the poet expressed the important thing as a friendly reminder for him. In the end, he finally has one thing to learn that woodspurge has a cup of tree which also has another meaning, if he becomes stuck in grief again, he should remember that there are God and his kindness that always guide him in to right path and it symbolized with three-petals woodspurge. Therefore, the last stanza is endearment of his sorrow because he certainly re-ignited his faith with nature's help indirectly.

Conclusion

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, one of the founder of Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, vowed to make a movement for opposing the Victorian's mediocre literature work theme such as socio-political, science and industries that overwhelming in those times. Dante and his confidant, thus imbued Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood's era with Aestheticism, that more linked with nature, faith and religion in sense of beauty nuance. This poem, nevertheless, were reflected to the people at those times, when the religion and faith were not as strong as before.

Dante used wind as representation of nature and as a device to mediate people until their faith revived again, just like in this poem. Thanks to the wind, that grieving man led to a woodspurge that reminds him to his God.

And it is all the Dante wanted, he wished that every people would not forget and surrender in their faith. If they did, just remember how beautiful the world it is and eventually they will keep in their mind that everything were a God's creation.