

# A close reading of 'daffodils' by william wordsworth

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A Close-Reading of ' DAFFODILS' By William Wordsworth The poem ' Daffodils' by William Wordsworth reflects the inherent connection between man and nature, which is so commonly found in his poetry; for example, in ' Tintern Abbey', and ' The Two-Part Prelude'. In my essay I am going to explore and analyse the variety of figurative devices Wordsworth uses to communicate this idea, and the poetic motives behind his writing. ' Daffodils' is essentially a lyric poem which is expressive of the feelings of joy the poet encounters when seeing the multitude of daffodils. In the preface to The Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth writes that " poetry is the image of man and nature". Wordsworth uses a variety of figurative devices to communicate this idea: for example, in the first line of the poem he uses reverse personification in representing himself metaphorically " as a cloud". Wordsworth then proceeds to personify the daffodils as humans, " dancing" (line 6) and " tossing their heads" (line 12). He also personifies the daffodils as a " jocund company"(line 16), suggesting the flowers have feelings just as humans do. Again, there is the suggestion of unity between man and nature when Wordsworth describes himself as feeling ' gay' in the company of the daffodils. The fact Wordsworth shows himself and nature as interchangeable, signifies the close relationship there is between man and nature in the Wordsworthian world. The poetic diction Wordsworth uses depicts nature in a positive, almost heavenly light ; for example, " a host" of daffodils, suggests perhaps a congregation of angels. The choice of the word ' host' is, I think, deliberate -it has far more connotations than the word ' crowd'. Also its position at the start of the line helps to emphasise not only the sheer multitude of daffodils but also the immediacy of impact on the beholder.

Such description creates a feeling of nature as a Utopia. The image of a lone cloud, wandering and floating aimlessly, is in stark contrast to the energetic "dancing" flowers who ride on the continuous beat of the poem. Here an effective contrast is drawn between the solitary shape of the cloud and the hyperbolically depicted "ten thousand" dancing flowers, which seems to suggest nature's immense power over mankind. This contrasting imagery correlates to the change from the poet's quiet, contemplative mood to one of almost ecstatic jubilation at the sight of the daffodils. The poet could also be suggesting that nature is continuously beating in the background all the time with a distinct purpose, whereas humans are often aimless, indecisive and purposeless. Wordsworth was a firm believer in the power nature held over man, and man's incapability of calculating the extent of this power. These contrasts challenge the reader to think about the connection between man and nature, and to examine the seemingly inextricable relationship between them. The imagery used to describe the daffodils reflects both the beauty and the consistency of nature. The daffodils are both "golden"(line 4) and "continuous"(line 7) stretching in a "never-ending line".(line 9) This is a powerful image in the poem because it builds a picture of nature as an eternal and inextinguishable force. In addition, the structure and metre of the poem play an important part in reflecting the consistency and regularity of nature. The poem is written in four six-lined stanzas of quatrain couplets, with a neat rhyming scheme of ABABCC. This rhyming pattern and also the regular iambic tetrameter give the poem a consistent flow. I think Wordsworth has used this poetic form to show the omnipresence of nature in the world in which we live. Paradoxically, however, in spite of this highly

regular poetic form and rhyming scheme, nature, with all its abundance, seems to be presented as an expansive, free force. I would say that Wordsworth is simply trying to create a sense of the continuity of nature, but also perhaps idealising the world of nature to an almost sublime level. There is a definite beat to the poem which adds to the musicality of the piece. Many of Wordsworth's lyrics were influenced by folk music of their day. This musicality is appropriately fitting for the "sprightly dance" (line 12) of the flowers. The idea of pantheism can be found in the poem: the speaker is a white, grey or nondescript colour, whilst the flowers are "golden" (line 4), demanding attention and admiration from the onlooker. Wordsworth could be emphasising the insignificance of the human in comparison with an almighty and beautiful god found in nature. Indeed, in the third stanza, the repetition and pauses in "I gazed - and gazed-" effectively describe how the poet is unable at first to comprehend the brilliance of the natural sight; he can only enjoy the company of the daffodils; but the image is something that colours his memory, and in the last stanza when he is alone once more "in pensive mood" he is able to recall the daffodils and savour and gain pleasure from the bright memory. Wordsworth identifies himself as a poet in the third stanza, suggesting the lyricism of the situation and also highlighting the happy mood of the poem. With the daffodils in his company he cannot help but bask in the light of their beauty and write admiring verses. The beauty of nature is awarded a certain permanence when Wordsworth emphasises how the flowers' beauty is not in any sense jaded by being looked at repeatedly. The repetition of the word "daffodils" right at the end of the poem impresses on the reader how the pleasurable image of the daffodils remains etched on

his memory. It is, I think, significant that Wordsworth has chosen to end the poem with the word "daffodils" as it also seems to leave the reader with a lasting image of these beautiful flowers. It also gives the poem a neat unity in that it recalls the image first introduced in line 4. Thus it forms a concrete memory in the mind of the poet and the reader, one in which the beauty shines on and on. This is yet another allusion to Wordsworth's belief of the continuity and permanence of nature. The final verse of the poem is particularly effective in communicating the power that the image of the daffodils holds over the poet. Wordsworth states that when his mind is empty or when he is thinking, the image flashes upon his "inward eye". It seems that the image invades both his subconscious and his conscious thinking states of mind and is deeply embedded inside his being. However invasive, Wordsworth claims this is the "bliss of solitude" and he enjoys seeing the daffodils constantly. Throughout the poem 'Daffodils' Wordsworth continuously conveys the idea of man and nature being inextricably linked. The "dancing daffodils" (line 6) are mirrored very effectively in the final line by the poet's heart that "dances" with the daffodils. This again implies that man and nature are interchangeable. Yet the poet also invites his reader to think about their contrasting features. This is most obviously portrayed in the physically energetic movement of the daffodils (representing nature), and the apathetic drifting of the cloud (representing man, the speaker), but also in the sheer multitude of flowers in comparison with the lonely and wayward cloud. It is not until the third stanza that the speaker stops hovering as a cloud and enjoys the "jocund company" of the flowers. The speaker is in awe of the golden daffodils for the majority of the poem until the final verse when

his heart joins the dance of the flowers. It is the figurative devices of personification and reverse personification that hint most prominently at the closeness of man and nature: man is a cloud and the daffodils dance like humans. In this poem I think Wordsworth attempts to communicate to the reader his ideas on the omnipresence and the expansiveness of nature, how it can reflect a beautiful and never-ending world of near perfection. Through the poetic imagery he also conveys the inextricable relationship between man and nature. The poem ends poignantly with the lasting and positive notion that nature's daffodils provide the speaker, " in the bliss of solitude"(line 22) with an invaluable and eternal memory. Bibliography Wordsworth, William " Daffodils" (1815) Page 546, Romanticism, An Anthology (third edition) Edited by Duncan Wu, Blackwell Publishing (1994)