

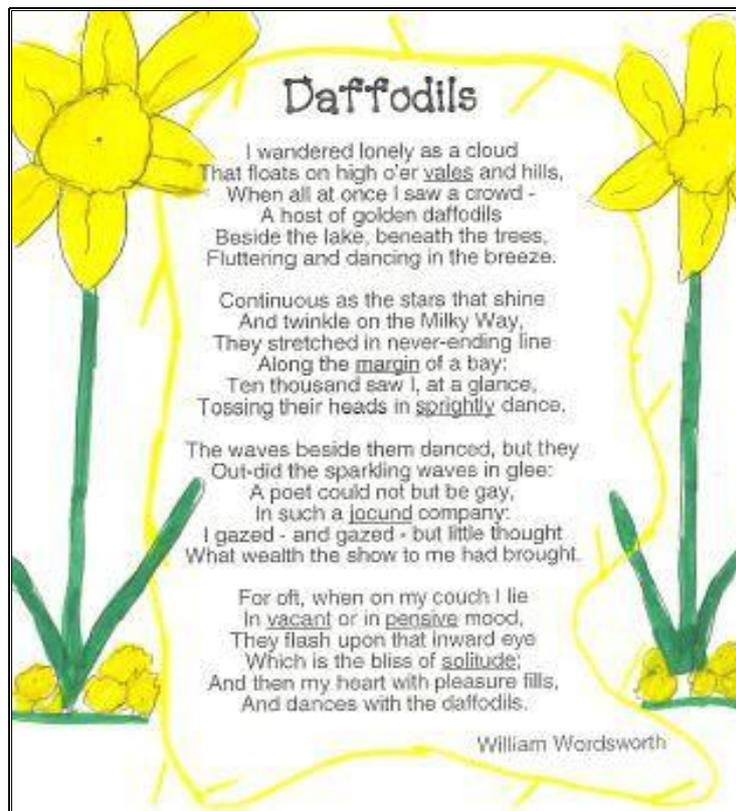
CUR

Third Year Students

Lecture: Bit lit

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The Daffodils by William Wordsworth – Analysis



COMMENTARY 1-SUMMARY

The poem 'Daffodils', also known by the title 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud', is a lyrical poem written by William Wordsworth in 1804. William Wordsworth is a well-known romantic poet who believed in conveying simple and creative expressions through his poems. He once said, "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility". William Wordsworth wrote Daffodils on a stormy day in spring, while walking along with his sister Dorothy near Ulswater Lake, in England. He imagined that the daffodils were dancing and invoking him to join and enjoy the breezy nature of the fields.



COMMENTARY2-SUMMARY

In the first stanza, the speaker describes a time when he meandered over the valleys and hills, “lonely as a cloud.” Finally, he came across a crowd of daffodils stretching out over almost everything he could see, “fluttering and dancing in the breeze”:

**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.**

In the second stanza, the speaker goes into more detail about the daffodils. They reminded him of the Milky Way, because there were so many flowers packed together that they seemed to be never ending. The speaker guesses that there were ten thousand daffodils, which were “Tossing their heads in sprightly dance”:

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

In the third stanza, the speaker compares the waves of the lake to the waves of daffodils and decides that even though the lake is “sparkling,” the daffodils win because they have more “glee.” He then comments that he, like any other poet, could not help but be happy

“in such a jocund company.” He looked at the scene for a long time, but while he was there he was unable to understand what he had gained from the experience:

The waves beside them danced; but they

Out-did 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:

In the fourth and final stanza, the poet describes what he gained from the experience. Afterwards, when he was lonely or feeling “pensive,” he could remember the daffodils, seeing them with his “inward eye,” and be content:

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.



COMMENTARY2-ANALYSIS

“I wandered lonely as a cloud” takes place in the Lake District of Northern England. The area is famous for its hundreds of lakes, gorgeous expanses of springtime daffodils, and for being home to the “Lakeland Poets”: William Wordsworth, Samuel Coleridge, and Robert Southey.

This poem, obviously inspired by Wordsworth's stomping grounds, is well-loved because of its simple yet beautiful rhythms and rhymes, and its rather sentimental topic. The poem consists of four six-line stanzas, each of which follow an ababcc rhyme scheme and are written in iambic tetrameter, giving the poem a subtle back-and-forth motion that recalls swaying daffodils.

By comparing himself to a cloud in the first line of the poem, the speaker signifies his close identification with the nature that surrounds him. He also demonstrates this connection by personifying the daffodils several times, even calling them a "crowd" as if they are a group of people.

The idea of remembering the beauty of nature even when not in its presence appears in several of Wordsworth's later poems, including "Tintern Abbey," "Ode; Intimations of Immortality," and "The Solitary Reaper." Even though the speaker is unable to appreciate the memory he is creating as he stands in the field, he later realizes the worth that it takes on in sad and lonely moments.

COMMENTARY 3

In A Nutshell

The official [Wordsworth Museum](#) bills "I wander lonely as a cloud" as [William Wordsworth's](#) "most famous poem about daffodils," which is a bit like referring to [Edgar Allan Poe's](#) most famous [poem about ravens](#). We kid. But seriously, Wordsworth did not write many poems about daffodils. This is, however, a very well-known poem, in part because it's so darned cheery. In very plain language, it describes how the speaker's loneliness is cured by a field of daffodils – you know, the yellow flowers with the center that looks a bit like a trumpet horn (see slideshow above). Many people know this poem simply as "Daffodils," but the title is actually "I wandered lonely as a Cloud."

Wordsworth is a British poet who is associated with the Romantic movement of the early 19th century. He lived in the picturesque Lake District in England. The poem is based on an experience that he had with his sister and constant companion, Dorothy, on April 15, 1802. Fortunately for us, Dorothy kept a journal, and she wrote about the day that she and her brother unexpectedly came across a "crowd" of daffodils:

The wind was furious... the Lake was rough... 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 seeds ashore & that the little colony had so sprung up — But as we went along there were more & yet more & 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 & about them, some rested their heads upon these stones as on a pillow for weariness & the rest tossed & reeled & danced & seemed as if they verily laughed with the wind that blew upon them over the Lake, they looked so gay ever glancing ever changing.

As the journal notes, it was a stormy day, which you'd never guess from reading the poem. She later writes that it rained on them, and they had to go home.

Wordsworth didn't write this poem until 1804, and it was published in 1807 in *Poems in Two Volumes*. He revised the poem and published it again in his *Collected Poems*, which is the version most people read today. With its expressions of joy and unity with nature, the poem is destined to remain a classic. It is typical of Wordsworth's revolutionary style of writing poetry in ordinary, everyday language.

Why Should I Care?

"I wandered lonely as a Cloud" describes an experience you've probably had: you're bummed out, maybe because of something that happened in a relationship or maybe because it's a nasty day outside, and suddenly you see something that just makes you smile and feel good again. And that's pretty much the main idea right there. You won't find any earth-shattering revelations of truth. Wordsworth felt that the little moments in life could be the most profound. Apparently, many readers agree with him, because they have made this one of the most beloved poems of all time. We think its popularity has something to do with how unabashedly joyful it is.

You don't often find poems as happy as this one. Literature thrives on conflict. You may remember having had to sit through one of those English lectures where every story ever written is broken down into basic conflicts like, "Man vs. Man," "Man vs. Nature," and, our favorite, "Man vs. Himself." Cheesy and simplistic, yes, but with a kernel of truth. Poetry is no less conflict-ridden than your average story or novel. Many poems are about depression, sadness, loss, family trauma, death, etc. But all the conflict in "I wandered lonely as a Cloud" is contained in the word "lonely." After the second line, the poem is all flowers and dancing. There aren't even any hidden anxieties buried underneath. Just flowers. And dancing. Did we mention the dancing?

Summary

The speaker was walking around through the hills and valleys, 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 all these 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.

Stanza 1 Summary

Lines 1-2

*I wandered lonely as a Cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and Hills,*

- 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."

- “Wandered” means roaming around without a purpose, like when you explore something. So it’s not necessarily a bad thing. But in its metaphorical use, “wandered” can mean feeling purposeless and directionless in general. As in, you have questions like, “What’s the meaning of my life?”
- The first concept that we want to take a look at is that the cloud is “lonely.” Asking questions about what this means will help us get into the poem.
- 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. (Except in cartoons where you can have a single rain cloud following Wiley E. Coyote around just to ruin his day.)
- 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.

Lines 3-4

*When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden Daffodils;*

- Suddenly (“all at once”), 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.

Lines 5-6

*Beside the Lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.*

- 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.
- Now, back to the poem. “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.

Stanza 2 Summary

Lines 7-8

*Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,*

- The 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.

Lines 9-10

*They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:*

- 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.

Lines 11-12

*Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.*

- 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 heads" 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.

Stanza 3 Summary

Lines 13-14

*The waves beside them danced; but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:*

- 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.

Lines 15-16

*A Poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company:*

- The speaker reenters the poem. (We've haven't seen you since the first line, buddy.) Except he refers to himself in the first person, by his vocation, "a poet."
- Despite his earlier loneliness, the speaker now can't help but feel happy, or "gay," with such a beautiful vision to look at.
- Or, as he puts it, with such joyful and carefree ("jocund") "company" to hang out with. The flowers and waves feel like companions to him. They are all pals. Group hug!

Lines 17-18

*I gazed—and gazed—but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:*

- 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

Stanza 4 Summary

Lines 19-20

*For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,*

- 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.

Lines 21-22

*They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;*

- 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.

Lines 23-24

*And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the Daffodils*

- 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

The Daffodils (Dance, Dance Revolution)

Symbol Analysis

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.

Clouds, Sky, and Heavens

Symbol Analysis

“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.

Angels and Spirits

Symbol Analysis

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

Speaker's Point of View

Who is the speaker, can she or he read minds, and, more importantly, can we trust her or him?

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.

Setting

Where It All Goes Down

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.