

THE DAFFODILS

About the poem – The Daffodils

The Romantic **poet** William Wordsworth's "I Wondered Lonely as a Cloud", also known as "The Daffodils" is probably his most famous **lyrical** work.

The poem was **written** in 1804, **inspired by** an event on 15 April 1802, in which Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy came across a "long belt" of daffodils while travelling in the Lake District of England. It was first **published** in 1807 in "Poems in Two Volumes" and a revised version was published in 1815. The original **title of the poem** "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" is merely the first line of the poem. It is somewhat misleading, as it suggests that there is something about the poet's loneliness in the poem. But the poem is all about the beauty of the daffodils and how they brought happiness to the poet. So some anthologists including Palgrave titled this poem as "Daffodils" or "The Daffodils" in their collections.

As for the **theme**, the poem is all about the beauty of nature. Wordsworth is often termed a nature-lover. And the Romantic Movement that he started with Samuel Taylor Coleridge is mainly characterized by the love and celebration of nature and beauty. This poem is a representative of **Romanticism** in English literature.

To talk about the **structure** of the poem, it is really very simple in form and language. Four stanzas of six lines each makes the entire poem 24 lines long. The rhyme scheme for each stanza is ABABCC, where the first (A) and the second (B) lines rhyme with the third (A) and the fourth (B) respectively. These are followed by a rhyming couplet (CC). The poem is also rich in its use of figures of speech.

And finally, it's a great example of a 'real poem', that is 'a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings', as opined by the poet himself. As, the poem expresses the feelings of the poet himself, it is a **subjective** poem, one of the most important characteristics of Romanticism.

Summary and Analysis of the poem: The Daffodils

Now we are in for a line-by-line analysis of the poem that begins here.

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.

The poet was travelling aimlessly just like a cloud over the hills and valleys of the mountainous Lake District in

England. At that time, suddenly he came across a large number of golden daffodils beside the lake and under the trees. The flowers were ‘fluttering and dancing’ in the breeze.

The poet directly compares himself to a cloud, as he was wandering without aim, just like the clouds. This is an example of **simile** (Simile is a figure of speech where two things are compared using ‘as’ or ‘like’. Read more about figures of speech). He also uses the expressions like ‘crowd’ and ‘host’ to mean that he saw a large area covered with a whole lot of daffodils. In the last line, the poet **personifies** the flowers by saying that they were fluttering (like birds or butterflies) and dancing (like human beings). There is also an indication that it was a breezy day. So we get an overall idea of the landscape which includes the valleys and hills, the lake, the trees, the flowers beneath them and the breezy atmosphere.

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.

Here is another **Simile**. The flowers are compared to the stars. They stretched in a continuous line just like the stars

in a galaxy like the Milky Way. Moreover, the daffodils were shining (as they were golden in colour) and twinkling (as they were fluttering in the breeze) as the stars. This comparison with the stars may have a greater implication in indicating that the flowers are heavenly as the stars.

The flowers were visible as far as the poet could see along the shore-line of a bay. That is why he uses the phrase “never-ending line”. Here ‘continuous’ and ‘never-ending’ may also suggest that the flowers left an everlasting impact on him.

Wordsworth exaggerates the number of flowers by saying “Ten thousand saw I at a glance”. That indicates that the poet has never seen so many daffodils at once. So he is just overjoyed. This type of exaggeration is called **hyperbole** (exaggerated statements or claims not meant to be taken literally).

The poet also says that the daffodils were tossing their heads as if they were dancing in happiness. Actually the poet was amazed at the beauty of the flowers. So, he found everything around him joyful. All these references of dancing and tossing heads are parts of his **personification** of the flowers.

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:

The waves in the bay were dancing and looking gleeful at the atmosphere. But the flowers outshone the lively waves in their happiness. Having such cheerful companion like the daffodils, a poet like Wordsworth cannot help being happy. So he was gazing constantly at the flowers and enjoying their beauty. The word ‘gazed’ is used twice to indicate how moved or charmed the poet was. So he gazed at them for a long time, forgetting his surroundings.

At that time, he did not think much about the ‘wealth’ that the flowers had brought to him. The poet realized that later, may be, after a few days. This ‘wealth’ is the happiness and the pleasant memory that he enjoyed for a long time since the day.

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.

By starting this stanza with 'For', the poet continues his reasoning for saying that the flowers had brought him 'wealth'. He clarifies why the sight of the flowers was so important in his life. Whenever he lies on his bed in a vacant or thoughtful mood, the daffodils flash upon his inner-eye, i.e., his imagination. The daffodils has become an everlasting memory for the poet, whenever he is lonely. So, he calls it 'a bliss of solitude', a blessing of staying alone.

And whenever he sees the flowers in his imagination, his heart fills with pleasure and his mind dances with the dancing daffodils.

This shows the poet's intense feelings. The poet has been able to depict the landscape and express his mind so vividly in so simple language and form, that really draws one's attention. And that is why this poem has been one of the most read and mentioned subjective poems in the history of English literature.