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Poetry Report #3: “I wandered lonely as a Cloud” – William Wordsworth (1815)

William Wordsworth’s poem “I wandered lonely as a Cloud” was inspired in 1802 and composed in 1804. The poem was first published in 1807 in *Poems, in Two Volumes*, and was later revised and republished in 1815. The inspiration for the poem came from an 1802 journal by Dorothy Wordsworth documenting a walk with her brother in Grasmere (Gallery). The primary amendment between Wordsworth’s two published forms of “I wandered lonely as a Cloud” is the addition of a stanza between the first two of the 1807 publication. The added stanza expands upon the existence of the daffodils, rather than their surroundings, and fosters a stronger identity for the flowers, “continuous as the stars that shine \ And twinkle on the milky way” within the margins of time and space (7-8). Wordsworth further revised line 4’s originally “dancing daffodils” to “golden daffodils” (4). Line 5’s “along the lake” was altered to “beside the lake” in order to promote the line’s alliteration with the letter b. Line 6 shifted from “Ten thousand dancing in the breeze” to “Fluttering and dancing in the breeze,” thus enhancing the poem’s visual experience through strong imagery. Finally, the 1807 version’s second stanza, line 10, exchanges the daffodil’s “laughing company” to “a jocund company” in line 16 of the 1815 version of the poem. These minor edits within the poem, aside from the addition of a new stanza, augment the prevalence of natural imagery to procure a tangible reading experience.

A *jocund* daffodil is one that is “feeling, expressing, or communicating mirth or cheerfulness,” or one that is “pleasant, cheering, delightful” (OED). This particular term is important due to Wordsworth’s intentional incorporation of the term in his revised 1815 publication of the work. As it was first described in 1807’s version, the “laughing company” of daffodils are actively “expressing joy,

mirth” or “amusement” until Wordsworth’s edit in 1815 allocates a *locund*, or jovial, personality unto the flowers that endures in constancy rather than exists in momentary joy dependent upon circumstance (OED). Arguably the most iconic aspect of the poem, as well as part of its titular identity, lies in the deliberate action of the speaker, in that he *wandered*. There is a pleasantness about the action of wandering, in that it encompasses the act of taking “one’s way casually or without predetermined route” in a manner that is unknown, but not unpleasant. However, to wander can also be “to travel, move or be carried about in an uncertain course” or “to stray” in a manner that is less controlled and anxiety-provoking. With Wordsworth’s speaker wandering “lonely as a cloud,” (1) it becomes clear that the latter is better applicable. Without context, the term *host* can be broadly defined within a plethora of applications. In one regard, the “crowd, \ a *host*, of golden daffodils” (3-4) could most immediately be considered as “a warlike gathering” (OED). This consideration allows the daffodils to maintain an air of perseverance within the imaginable dainty gentility of a common flower. Besides the strength of the flowers, in their united army, are also softened by their definition as a *host* with a Biblical derivation. Originally Hebrew, a *host* is “applied to a) the multitude of angels that attend upon God, and b) the sun, moon, and stars” (OED). Viewing the daffodils in this Biblical light illuminates nature as a divine reflection of a Holy creator, and empowers the daffodils with a godly nature within the natural world. The definition of a *host* as “sun, moon, and stars” is continuous with Wordsworth’s depiction of the daffodils as “continuous as the stars that shine \ And twinkle on the milky way” that further plucks the flowers from an earthly identity and places them within infinity.

The lack of allusions in the poem indicate the genuine distinctiveness as a memory of Wordsworth himself, rather than a compilation of historical or figurative memories with a material origin. The poem stems from memory directly originating from Wordsworth’s own experience and memory, so the inclusion of allusion would weaken the independence and individuality of the poem

as unique and natural. Furthermore, an allusion could detract from the emphasis on the daffodils by leading the mind to focus on things other than the core of the poem.

Wordsworth's poem is constructed in predominantly regular iambic tetrameter, with each line beginning with an unstressed syllable, alternating unstressed – stressed, and concluding with a stressed syllable. The poem is comprised of four stanzas of six lines that follow an ABABCC rhyme scheme. A dactyl in line 6, "Fluttering and dancing in the breeze" could function in one of two ways: first, to place emphasis on the movement of the breeze to create a quick movement of fluttering. In another instance, Wordsworth could intend fluttering to be broken into two syllables rather than three to fit the consistency of iambic tetrameter, which would allow "breeze" at the end of the line to remain unstressed and flow such as a gentle breeze would.

The use of simile in "I wandered lonely as cloud" serves as a platform to create narrative depth and removal from the observations made in the poem. The speaker's self-comparison in "I wandered lonely as a cloud \ That floats on high o'er vales and hills" allows the speaker to rise above the scenery himself and observe the scene from an objective point of view (1-2). As the speaker grows more distant from the landscape, he grows closer to the heavens, just as the daffodils are "continuous as the stars that shine \ And twinkle on the milky way" (7-8).

"I wandered lonely as a Cloud" could be considered in tandem with many other works by Wordsworth through the depiction of man's engagement with the natural world. In terms of generalized structure, William Wordsworth's poem "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour. July 13, 1798" resembles "I wandered lonely as a Cloud" in its manner of speaker removal from setting. Where "I wandered lonely as a Cloud" removes the speaker through a simile comparing him to a cloud that "floats on high," (2) "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey" also separates speaker and setting through having the speaker "behold these steep and lofty cliffs ... under this dark sycamore" (5, 10). The

title of the poem itself immediately puts distance – physical rather than metaphorical – between the observer and the observations. With this as evidence, it is clear that Wordsworth’s appreciation for nature and the natural world comes through a distanced appreciation that allows him to view the whole of creation. However, Wordsworth’s speakers are often, such as in these two poems, able to convey intricacies as well as generalities about the perceptible world.

A paper topic in relation to Wordsworth’s “I wandered lonely as a Cloud” would be to consider the work in conjunction with works by friend and fellow author Samuel Taylor Coleridge. A string of connection between Wordsworth’s “I wandered lonely as a Cloud” and Coleridge’s “Frost at Midnight” is found in their representation of nature to convey emotion or philosophical thought and feeling. Wordsworth utilizes flowers and nature to create a feeling of peace or safety, while Coleridge uses the color of nature to produce anxiety and feelings of separation.

Works Cited

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