

An Analysis on The Daffodils and Wordsworth's Romantic View of Nature

Yi Liu

School of Foreign Languages, Jilin Engineering Normal University, Changchun 130052, Jilin Province, China

Abstract: Wordsworth is the leading figure of English Romanticism in the 19th century and the most famous poet among the “Lake Poets”. He ushers in a new era of Romanticism for the English literature, and also exerts a great influence on the world literature. Most of his poems are about the natural scenery from which he explores its impact on human’s soul, so he has been regarded as “a poet of nature”. This thesis reveals the formation of the poet’s romantic view of nature and its demonstrations by analyzing one of his famous poems The Daffodils.

Keywords: Wordsworth; nature; View of nature

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***Corresponding author:** Yi Liu, liuyi20030330@126.com

William Wordsworth (1770-1850) is the brilliant representative poet of the English Romanticism in the 19th century. He, together with Coleridge and Southey, is known as “Lake Poet”, as they lived in the district of the great lakes in Northwestern England. Yet Wordsworth is the best known among the group. In 1798, Wordsworth and Coleridge jointly published the “Lyrical Ballads”, which marked the break with the conventional poetical tradition of the 18th century and the beginning of the Romantic revival in England.

Wordsworth’s theory and practice in poetical creation started from a dissatisfaction with the social reality under capitalism, and hinted at the thought of “back to nature”. He emphasizes that nature is indeed the source of human being’s happiness and can endow us with the ideological support and psychological comfort. For Wordsworth, he would like to choose

incidents and situations from common life, especially the low and rustic life. In his view, the rustic, who possessed “the elementary feelings” of man, lived a harmonious life with nature. And the language in his poetry is very simple and pure. In his words, the language used should be “a selection of language really used by men”.(i.e. against poetic diction in the period of Neo-classicism) Therefore, it is Wordsworth who brings a refreshing flavor of nature to the poetry of the 19th century, and makes people abandon the artificial and elaborated beauty in the period of Neo-classicism^[1].

As a great poet of nature, Wordsworth wrote many famous poems to express his love for nature, and these poems bring us the enjoyment of beauty and the pleasure of mind. And this thesis will analyze one of his most famous poems The Daffodils, as well as the romantic view of nature in the poem.

1 The Daffodils---Spiritual Purification of Nature on Man’s Soul

The Daffodils was created in 1804 and published in 1807. The language of this poem is very simple and succinct, which completely demonstrates the vivid characteristics of Wordsworth’s poetry, such as reverence for nature, appreciation of memory, transcendental experience and so on.

In the poem, the reverence for nature is manifested through the personified description. In the beginning the poet just compares himself to a cloud which is wandering through a landscape lonely. The first line “I wandered lonely as a cloud” immediately establishes the speaker’s loneliness. However, the poet is suddenly struck by the sight of a field of daffodils. And the daffodils are happy and bristling with life,

in sharp contrast with the poet's loneliness. They are "dancing" and "tossing" their heads, and then the poet compares the flowers to the "stars that shine/ And twinkle on the milky way". The daffodils are described as "golden", not yellow, because "golden" suggests more than a color and it connotes light. In addition, the daffodils are in large numbers, and their vast number is emphasized in the second stanza when the poet describes them as "continuous" and "in a never-ending line". Actually the emphasis on the happiness of the daffodils and their large number just serves as a foil to the isolation and depression of the speaker.

But this contrast between the poet and the landscape soon becomes fused or integrated in the third stanza, where the relationship between them becomes one intimate union, suggesting an identity of the mood between subject and object. And the spirits of the poet also turn "gay" and "jocund" consequently. The repetition of "gaze" with double dash in line seventeen further manifests the poet's state of integrating himself with the nature and getting ease of mind and even oblivious of himself.

The influence of this experience is retrospected in the last stanza. And the poet lives far away from uproar; as a result it is inevitable for him to feel lonely and depressed after a long time. Therefore, loneliness often seizes the poet as he lies on his couch. Though he is far from nature physically, he somehow feels sort of connection with it through the power of imagination. Then it is the daffodils that make the poet suddenly realize "the bliss of solitude". And his initial perceptual knowledge about the daffodils has been enhanced to the rational knowledge. Since his life in seclusion affords him more time to carefully contemplate on this experience. Just like what the poet says: "They flash upon that inward eye/ which is the bliss of solitude". Here, the word "bliss", which is full of strong Christian sense, reflects the poet's idea of pantheism or deism to some extent. And it is certain that nature is beautiful and holy, and it could offer pleasure, tranquility and purification of mind. Consequently, the poet finds the way of pursuing the spiritual self-salvation through the nature.

And throughout the poem, we can find out that the diction of this poem is rather simple, direct and clear. The image of daffodils and the change of the poet's mood appear vividly through those carefully chosen words. We can see the description of the poet's spirits

change from loneliness to solitude. Both words denote loneliness but they are different in essence. In the beginning the poet feels sadly alienated separation, yet in the end the emptiness of the poet's spirit is transformed into a fullness of feeling when he "remembers" the daffodils. At that time, although he is alone, he obtains the particular joy, satisfaction and spiritual purification in solitude.

2 The Formation of Wordsworth's Romantic View of Nature

Wordsworth's romantic view of nature can't be separated from his experience in the childhood. He lived near the lakes in the countryside when he was little. Wordsworth was very sensitive; and he especially likes to appreciate the tranquil lake and beautiful valley alone. He learns to watch, experience and think over everything around him carefully. The beautiful scenery of the lakes impressed him most. And his favorite thing is to go for a stroll in the valley near the lakes under the silent star-studded sky, which exerted a profound influence on his later works. Therefore, it is the integration of sensitivity and loneliness that directs Wordsworth to nature, makes him own a special feeling towards nature and finally becomes a poet with deep pondering over nature.

On the other hand, the formation of Wordsworth's view of nature is closely connected with the political background of that period. He was once a crazy supporter of French Revolution (1789-1799). However, with the failure of French Revolution, his beautiful hope vanished like soap bubbles. As a result, Wordsworth gradually turned his vision from "man" to "nature". Meanwhile, he began to accept the advanced idea of Rousseau, who advocated "natural rights" and "returning to nature"^[2]. The idea of Rousseau exerted a great impact on Wordsworth, so he attempted to seek for a mysterious power to salvage the soul of man. That is to protest against the science and technology and yearn for the beautiful nature which is not contaminated by civilization. Therefore, Wordsworth's romantic view of nature came into being.

Wordsworth believes strongly that we can achieve both the ideological support and spiritual comfort, as well as the inexhaustible source of moral power through the intimate connection with nature^[3]. And that is Wordsworth's romantic view of nature. Wordsworth has experienced the pleasure offered by

nature with an outstanding power; meanwhile, he has conveyed the pleasure to us time and time again still with an outstanding power, letting us enjoy it together with him. That is the greatness of his poetry.

3 The Romantic View of Nature through The Daffodils

Through the poem, Wordsworth develops the vision of the daffodils; and through this simple experience he tries to explore the relationship between humanity and nature. Therefore, in his eyes nature can not only refresh oneself and fill oneself with happiness, but it can also be condensed into a beautiful memory which will comfort one's heart when in solitude.

We can not simply generalize Wordsworth's poems into the category of pastoral poetry because they have surpassed the definition of pastoral poetry, with a strong philosophical meaning. As a result, for Wordsworth, the natural scenery is not absolutely limited to what is shown in front of us, but a metaphysically transcendental noumenon with a more profound implication^[4]. Wordsworth carries forward the idea of pantheism and figures out that the soul of God is not in the heaven but in the nature, that is, there exists the soul of God everywhere in the nature. Meanwhile, the soul of man also depends on the nature, and nature is the integration of divine and the rational --- a kind of spiritual existence. Therefore, Wordsworth would like to be close to nature and return to seek the truth from the eternal nature, thus readjusting the relationship between man and nature which has been alienated by the industrialism and commercialism and recovering the initially harmonious state between man and universe.

Wordsworth holds the psychology of worship towards nature. He believes that nature is the embodiment of purity, beauty and kindness, and it has the function of mysterious and benevolent instruction. He once claims that nature means everything to him, so he does not merely appreciate and eulogize the natural beauty but also regards it as a good teacher and helpful friend of the human being. Because nature is able to mold the temperament, strengthen the confidence for living, and even rescue the soul and change the existential meaning and value.

And in *The Daffodils* of Wordsworth we can experience the interaction and correspondence between man and nature, and come to understand the

divinity and philosophy which "nature" is endowed with in his poem.

The beauty of nature strongly appeals to the imagination of Wordsworth and becomes the fountain-heads of his inspiration, because he knows well that only with inspiration could he speak out his true feelings or in other words "all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings"^[2]. And the poem of *The Daffodils* expresses such a philosophical theory: nature is the source of man's happiness and it can purify the soul as well as reduce the darkness and ugliness in the secular world. And that "host of golden daffodils" which are carefree and contented just purify the mind of the poet, and the purification also imperceptibly influences numerous readers through the poet.

Wordsworth's attention to nature is to explore a kind of mysterious force to rescue the human being and readjust the relationship between man and nature which has been alienated by industrialization. And in face of the "deprivation" of civilization, Wordsworth proposes to return to nature to achieve the salvation. As returning to nature could maintain the true feelings in the inner world and obtain the authentic happiness and enlightenment from it. Meanwhile, it can also offer the way and methods to solve the problems in life and society. And this is exactly the chief motive for Wordsworth to keep away from the realistic society and deeply fall in love with mountains and rivers.

4 Conclusion

In the poem of *The Daffodils*, Wordsworth unfolds all the memory and imagination about the daffodils and fills the simple situation with lingering charm. In the meantime, he also finalizes the instantaneous comprehension of the heart to eternity. Therefore, it is to say that, in his opinion, man and nature are both the indispensable components of the universe. The attention to nature is exactly the attention to man, likewise, the attention to man's living should not be separable from the attention to the nature. He founded a new tradition of romanticism and greatly influenced the later poets such as Byron and Shelly. And he is regarded as an epoch-making pioneer and deserves to be remembered for his contributions to the development of English Poetry.

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