

Study of the Language Features of *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*

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Abstract: In this paper, the author makes a comprehensive analysis of the language features of *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*, a masterwork written by William Wordsworth from the perspective of nature images, rhythm and meter as well as rhetorical devices. In terms of nature imagery, the images of ‘flowers’ and ‘clouds’ are employed to highlight the poet’s feelings of loneliness and solitude. In terms of rhythm and meter, the poem follows the rhythm of iambic tetrameter and the rhyme scheme: ababcc, efefgg, hihikk, lmlmnn. In terms of rhetorical devices, the poem mainly employs simile, personification, enjambment and symbolism. Through the exploration of the natural imagery, metrical properties and rhetorical devices, the study has elucidated the artistic allure of the poem and its significant place within the canon of English Romantic literature.

Keywords: William Wordsworth; *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*; Language Features.

1. Introduction

England in the early nineteenth century experienced the rise and development of the Industrial Revolution, a period that signified a substantial shift from an agrarian society to an industrial one. The advancement of industrialization brought about economic growth, yet it also led to environmental pollution, urbanization, and worsening living conditions for the working class. These changes had a lasting impact on English society and everyday life.

In the realm of literature, the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth century marked the zenith of English Romanticism. Wordsworth’s joint publication of “Lyrical Ballads” with his friend Samuel Taylor Coleridge marked the flourishing of Romantic literature. The Romantic movement emphasized individual emotions, the beauty of nature, imagination, and a challenge to traditional norms. In terms of language, Romantic poetry was characterized by its use of elaborate metaphors, vivid imagery, and musicality. Poets of this era often employed a loose, conversational style, which was a marked departure from the formal, structured poems of the previous era. This new language was intended to evoke emotion in the reader and to create a sense of connection between the poet and the audience. Romantic poetry can be mainly divided into two schools: the Lake Poets and the Revolutionary Poets. The poet William Wordsworth, whom we discuss in this article, was a renowned member of the Lake Poets.

1.1. About the Poet

William Wordsworth (1770-1850) was an English romantic poet who later became Poet laureate. He was born in 1770 and orphaned at a tender age. His affection for the Muses was nurtured during his tenure at Cambridge University. In the 1790s, Wordsworth embarked on a continental journey to support French Revolution. However, the subsequent demise and chaos of the revolution delivered a profound disillusionment. It was at his most trying hour that his sister, Dorothy, offered him sustaining support, aiding in the rebuilding of his spirit. In 1843, he was honored with a knighthood for his contributions to literature. Despite facing

personal challenges in his later years, Wordsworth maintained his literary prowess until his passing in 1850, leaving an enduring legacy that profoundly impacted English literature.

William Wordsworth’s poetry pursues simplicity and naturalness in form, eschewing complex poetic styles and structures, which makes his poetry more accessible and relatable to the general public. Wordsworth’s poetic theory emphasizes the naturalness, intuitiveness, and depth of emotion in poetry. It advocates that poetry should focus on everyday life and the beauty of nature, attempting to express the most profound thoughts and emotions through the simplest language and form.

1.2. About the Poem *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*

I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud was written by William Wordsworth in 1804 based on his recollections and published in 1807. It is said that the inspiration comes from one walk taken on April 15, 1802 when William Wordsworth ambled through the undulating hillsides of the English Lake District accompanied by his beloved sister, Dorothy. It was within this sinuous landscape that they chanced upon a sea of daffodils. This natural tableau etched itself deeply into the poet’s heart, becoming a lasting and poignant memory that would ultimately inspire his literary masterpiece. “*I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*,” also titled “*Daffodils*,” is a lyrical poem that captures the essence of this indelible memory, brimming with the spirit of Romanticism.

The “I” of the poem, which is Wordsworth himself, experiences a profound sense of loneliness and melancholy in the sea of daffodils. Like a solitary cloud meandering through the vast expanse of the sky, the poet’s inner world is steeped in solitude. However, as he observes the small yet resplendent flowers dancing in the wind, his spirits begin to lift gradually. These flowers are not merely botanical entities but mirrors of the emotions lurking within his soul. The beauty and vitality of the daffodils seem to impart to him that, even in the midst of loneliness and sorrow, he can find serenity and peace within. Wordsworth’s gaze is captivated by the endless rows of daffodils bordering the lake shore. Their golden petals, bathed in the warm rays of the sun, appear to sway gently in

the soft breeze. In the presence of this natural spectacle, he feels an inexpressible joy and a profound connection to the natural world, as if the solitude and depression inherent in his nature are soothed by the tender force of nature's beauty.

The poem "*I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*" is a eulogy to the aesthetic splendor of nature by William Wordsworth, encapsulating his profound insights into the essence of life. Through the evocative depiction of daffodils in full bloom, Wordsworth conveys his ardent love for the natural world and his cherished appreciation of the sublime moments in life, while also echoing the solace and enlightenment he finds within its bounds.

2. Language Features of *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*

2.1. Nature Images

Nature imagery in literature and art represents natural phenomena that convey the author's emotions and carry cultural meaning. Nature imagery often includes the grandeur of mountains and rivers, the liveliness of plants and animals, and the cosmic wonders of the sun, moon, and stars. These scenes, with their unique features, colors, and symbolic significance, are used by writers and artists to express deep emotions and philosophical thoughts. For instance, in classical Chinese poetry, the moon symbolizes unity and longing, while willows represent the bitter sweetness of parting and melancholy. In this poem, the poet extensively employed natural imagery to express his own emotions. "The author uses nature imagery, especially the imagery of 'flowers' and 'clouds', to express his feelings of loneliness and solitude." (Zahida,2016)

In the opening line "I wandered lonely as a cloud", the narrator aligns himself with a solitary "cloud", utilizing the imagery to encapsulate his sense of loneliness and his removed perspective from the earthly realm below. The solitude of the cloud is relative, for clouds typically aggregate in the celestial canvas, forming a stark contrast against the collective mass of golden daffodils that punctuate the landscape.

As described in "A host, of golden daffodils", the "daffodils", bedazzling symbols of springtime and rejuvenation, are likened to a "host"-a legion or an assembly-highlighting both their numerous quantities and the organized elegance they embody. The daffodils' ceaseless dance is nature's own jubilation, mirroring the poet's intramural elation. "For example, when describing the flowers, Wordsworth uses words like "golden" and "cheerful", which create a warm and bright atmosphere." (Proffitt,1981) However, when he describes the cloud, he uses words like "lonely" and "float", which create a cold and desolate atmosphere. The contrast between the two images highlight the poet's lonely and desolate feeling at that time.

Through the employment of these distinct images, Wordsworth articulates in the poem a profound admiration for the natural world's aesthetic grace, profound meditations on the nature of time and eternity, and a yearning for a harmonious coexistence between the self and the natural order. Through the interweaving of these images, Wordsworth successfully integrates the beauty of nature into the poem, allowing readers to experience the awe and nourishment that natural beauty imparts to the soul while appreciating the poetry.

2.2. Rhythm and Metre

"*I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*" stylistically, belongs to the sixtain stanza, a quatrain followed by a hexameter. The entire poem exhibits a regular rhyme scheme: ababcc, efefgg, hihikk, lmlmnn. The first four lines of each stanza rhyme with each other, followed by a couplet with identical rhyme. Specifically speaking, the first stanza follows ababcc pattern, with rhyming words in alternating single and double lines: "cloud" rhyming with "crowd," "hills" with "daffodils", "trees" with "breeze"; the second stanza follows efefgg pattern, with rhyming words in alternating single and double lines: "shine" rhyming with "line," "way" with "bay," "glance" with "dance"; the third stanza follows hihikk pattern, with rhyming words in alternating single and double lines: "they" with "gay", "glee" with "company", "thought" with "brought"; the last stanza follows lmlmnn pattern, with rhyming words in alternating single and double lines: "lie" with "eye", "mood" with "solitude", "fills" with "daffodils".

The rhythm of English poetry is constructed from the alternation of light and heavy stressed syllables. The fundamental rhythms in English poetry are categorized into five types: iambic, trochaic, anapestic, dactylic, and amphibrachic. (Zhao,2009) The dominant rhythm in the poem *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud* is the iambic tetrameter, consisting of four iambs in each line. The unstressed syllables are followed by stressed syllables, creating a natural and easy-to-follow rhythm that evokes images of the gentle movement of clouds overhead. For example, in the last line of the first stanza, "Fluttering and dancing in the breeze," "fluttering" is stressed, and "and" is unstressed. For the last line of each stanza, the meter shifts from iambic to trochaic, which not only adds a touch of novelty to the otherwise monotonous rhyme pattern but also reflects the poet's unique blend of sadness and joy.

2.3. Rhetorical Device

I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud is a poem that masterfully employs simile, personification, enjambment and symbolism to enhance its meaning and emotional impact.

2.3.1. Simile

Simile is an explicit comparison between two objects linking by simile marker such as "like" or "as" to create a visual or sensory association. It is used to enhance the vividness and clarity of descriptions, and to evoke emotions or moods.

In the line "I wandered lonely as a cloud", the poet compares himself to a lonely wandering white cloud, floating high in the sky, which reflects the poet's unrestrained but melancholic state.

In the line "Continuous as the stars that shine/And twinkle on the milky way", the poet compares the daffodils to the twinkling stars of nature, (Jiang,2010) which endows it with the essence of nature and is the wonderful embodiment of the poet's spirit of worshiping nature. The daffodil represents the poet's emotional connection with nature. These comparisons enrich the poem's visuals and allow readers to share in the poet's wonder and joy at the natural world.

2.3.2. Personification

In English poetry, personification is a technique where human attributes are given to non-human subjects to create vivid, relatable, and often emotional descriptions.

In the lines "Beside the lake, beneath the trees/Fluttering and dancing in the breeze" and "Ten thousand saw at a

glance/Tossing their heads in sprightly dance”, the poet compares a host of golden daffodils swaying in the breeze to delightful dancers. The employment of personification vividly reflects the beautiful posture of daffodils and the poet’s love for them.

In the lines “The waves beside them danced, but they/Outdid the sparkling waves in glee, the poet employs double personification here. In the poet’s mind, both the waves in the lake and daffodils along the bay are dancing and they are even competing with each other as can be seen through words such as “danced” and “outdid”. The employment of personification vividly reflects that the poet’s overcast mood has been swept away, leaving only boundless joy and endless reverie about the future.

2.3.3. Enjambment

Being a common feature in poetry, enjambment is featured with the continuation of a sentence or clause beyond the end of a line, thereby avoiding an abrupt break at the natural conclusion of a thought. This stylistic choice enhances the fluidity and coherence of the poem, enabling the reader to traverse the lines without interruption and to merge seamlessly into the poetic realm.

In this poem, enjambment is utilized to convey the continuity of the poet’s wanderings and the ceaseless flow of the natural world. In the lines, “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”, the enjambment is employed at the beginning of the third lines through the connection word “that” as the word prolongs the visualization of the first two lines, allowing the reader to effortlessly follow the poet’s perspective. This smooth transition shifts the reader’s attention from the drifting cloud to the expansive views of the valleys and hills.

2.3.4. Symbolism

Symbolism involves the use of symbols or allegories to represent ideas, emotions, or themes. Symbols can be concrete objects, characters, locations, colors, animals, plants, which are endowed with deeper meanings beyond their literal significance. In poetry, symbolism is often employed to express the poet’s abstract thoughts or to imply complex aspects of human nature, society, politics, or philosophy.

In the poem, the poet employs the imagery of “clouds” to encapsulate profound implications. “Wordsworth felt a strong sense of solitude amidst the secular human society. He yearned to be unbridled, drifting like clouds at will, capable of going anywhere.”(Guo,2020) The poet symbolizes himself as the “clouds,” identifying with their situation, which elicits a sense of melancholic sorrow. This distinctive symbolic significance is also rooted in the diminishing influence of Rationalism in the late 18th century, coupled with the impact of the French Revolution, during which the masses increasingly sought social ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity. People no longer suppressed their human desires and the liberation of individuality, as humanistic thoughts continued to influence the people of Europe.

Moreover, within this poem, the poet employs the symbolic meaning of “daffodils” to represent the relationship between

“man and nature.” Prior to encountering the daffodils, the poet perceived himself merely as “a lonely cloud,” yet upon witnessing the vast expanse of daffodils, his mood shifted from sorrow to joy. No longer preoccupied with his own loneliness and sorrow, the poet, through the daffodils, associated with the entire natural world, and his mood gradually became serene and genuine. “In Western culture, ‘daffodils’ symbolize the pursuit of beauty, purity and loveliness. In the poem, the poet views the daffodils as the messengers of spring, the embodiment of freedom, and the source of joy.”(Li,2017) William Wordsworth produced numerous works centered on nature, expressing his profound love for the natural world and his grand ideal of harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature.

As can be seen, the above rhetorical devices work together to create a poem that is both visually and emotionally engaging, allowing the reader to share in the poet’s experience of nature and to feel the profound impact of the daffodils on their sense of wonder and solace.

3. Conclusion

This paper has delved into the linguistic characteristics of William Wordsworth’s “*I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*,” from the perspective of natural imagery, metrical properties, and rhetorical device. The research findings are as follows: in terms of natural imagery, two major images are employed: “cloud” and “daffodils. It is found that natural imagery not only enriches the imagery of the poetry but also lays the foundation for subsequent emotional expression. Regarding metrical characteristics, the poem follows the rhythm of iambic tetrameter and the rhyme scheme: ababcc, efefgg, hihikk, lmlmnn. In terms of rhetorical device, the poem mainly employs smile, personification, enjambment and symbolism to imbue the poem with greater expressiveness and deepen the reader’s comprehension of the poem’s theme. All in all, this study has elucidated the artistic allure of the poem and its significant place within the canon of English Romantic literature.

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