

Nature as a Powerful Force in Literature

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Abstract

This paper was originally written for Dr. Margaret Linley, for a lower-division English course, ENGL 115W. The assignment asked students to reflect on the interconnectedness of literature and nature through analysis of both the form and content of a piece of text discussed in class. The text chosen to highlight the integral relationship shared between nature and literature was William Wordsworth's poem "I wandered lonely as a cloud." The paper uses MLA citation style.

Nature is perhaps one of the most complex and intricate words in the English language. From its ability to represent the quality or character of something, to its embodiment of the physical world, the word nature is undoubtedly in frequent use. Loaded with meaning and versatile in its use, nature is also a prominent theme in various works of literature. Since it can be viewed through multiple lenses, it becomes essential to analyze literature carefully in order to recognize the manner in which nature is being depicted. One such example where nature is at the forefront can be observed in William Wordsworth's most notable poems published in 1807. The vivid and picturesque language in Wordsworth's "I wandered lonely as a cloud" depicts nature as an inherently integral force that guides and directs humans, revealing the significant role nature possesses in influencing and shaping everyday life.

In Wordsworth's "I wandered lonely as a cloud," the poem's narrator depicts nature as a physical force. Coupled with the figurative language, Wordsworth is able to express the sheer significance and strength of this physical force that often goes unnoticed but is obviously present in abundance. As the narrator walks alone beside a lake, he sees a host of daffodils "fluttering and dancing in the breeze" (6). They are as "continuous as the stars that shine, and twinkle on the milky way, stretch[ing] in a never-ending line" (6-9). The powerful breeze, bright stars, and the seemingly limitless milky way, all physical forces of

nature, have the ability to leave an impact on the environment. The breeze has the capability to direct and sway its surroundings with ease, establishing the sheer strength and invincible essence of nature. Personifying the daffodils, by implying that they dance in the breeze emphasizes the impact of this physical force, almost making the environment seem malleable to it. The subtlety of the breeze, yet its tremendous impact on the environment reveals nature as a mysterious yet dominating force with the ability to direct and sway anything in it. Not only that, but also the incorporation of a simile when comparing the numerous daffodils to the stars on the milky way further highlights how nature exists on a large scale. Nature's significance and vastness is implied by the simile, and the reference to the milky way indicates eternity and the infinite occupance of nature. Furthermore, the usage of words such as "continuous" and "never-ending" reinforce nature as a powerful physical force by bringing attention to its unceasing, unwavering, and insurmountable presence. Since the words "continuous," "never-ending," and even "ten thousand [daffodils]" (in line 11) all express a large and endless quantity of something, and are used in the same stanza, Wordsworth enforces the reader to recognize nature's limitlessness and power through the implementation of these similar meaning words. Quite evidently, nature's presence as a substantial and powerful physical force is illustrated by Wordsworth in the initial stanzas of the poem.

Wordsworth also portrays nature as an emotional force, possessing the powerful capability of improving one's mood by providing contentment and tranquility. As the thousands of daffodils fluttered in the breeze, "a poet could not but be gay" because he was "in such a jocund company" (15-16). As the beautiful sight stretches along the bay, "[his] heart with pleasure fills" (23). The impressive sight of nature, such as the blooming daffodils, act as a powerful restoring agent. The initial solitude felt by the narrator slowly dissipates into intense cheerfulness and pleasure. Acting as a remedy from one's daily struggles, nature is able to provide a quick escape from the daily drudgery and stressors of life. With its ability to uplift mood, nature acts as a quick remedy due to its restorative qualities. Its presence simply prompts feelings of bliss, releasing one of any pain or agony. Additionally, the form of the poem – in this case, it being a lyric poem further highlights nature as an emotional force. Lyric poetry often conveys emotions and is intimate in its form. Since the poem articulates personal feelings and emotions that are evoked solely due to the presence of nature, the characterization of nature as an emotional force becomes apparent. The usage of words such as "jocund,"

“pleasure,” and “gay” are all synonymous and express feelings of intense joy. This repetition of similar meaning words in the same stanza compels the reader to view nature as a source of joy. Additionally, the word “jocund” gives a harsh j and c sound while the word “gay” and even “glee” (used in line 14) give a harsh g sound. Wordsworth’s use of cacophonies (all in the same stanza) sparks the reader’s interest due to the loudness and energy in the hard consonant sounds of these words. Wordsworth’s clever cacophony brings the reader’s focus on the harsh sounding words that signify joy, thus allowing them to realize the sheer pleasure and immediate positive impact the view of nature has on the narrator’s emotional health, proving nature to be an emotional force.

Through his elaborate and descriptive language, Wordsworth depicts nature as an imaginative and spiritual force. The narrator’s experience spectating the wonders of nature left a lasting impression on him as “when on [his] couch [he] lies, in vacant or pensive mood, [the picturesque scene] flashes upon that inward eye” (19-21). The narrator, reminiscing on the view, is able to find comfort and solace in nature. The memory of nature that lingers in one’s mind after experiencing it signifies its meaningfulness. Nature ignites inspiration and forms memories, as implied by it flashing the “inward eye.” The metaphor, comparing the mind with the inward eye, emphasizes nature’s intrinsic quality in acting as an imaginative force when the mind is idle by providing motivation or inspiration, or when the mind is in thought and needs to be propelled by creativity and insight. In difficult times when the mind needs artistic inspiration, motivation, or even encouragement, the memory of nature, or simply its presence surrounding the individual comes in to provide quick relief. As the unforgettable scene of nature “flash[es] upon [the narrator’s] inward eye, [it becomes] a bliss of solitude (21-22). Wordsworth’s usage of the phrase “bliss of solitude” suggests that quiet time spent in nature allows for reflection, giving one an opportunity to clarify thoughts, discover and re-evaluate values, thus igniting the possibility of evolving healthier perspectives on life, leading to spiritual growth. The memory of nature quite evidently has a big impact on the narrator as it is referred to as a “bliss.” The usage of words such as “bliss” and “inward eye” both carry spiritual meaning, and their implementation suggests the spiritual impact nature can have on an individual. Quite evidently, Wordsworth depicts nature as an imaginative and spiritual force.

“I wandered lonely as a cloud” by William Wordsworth focuses on the various aspects of nature that play an important role in everyday life. Through the

use of figurative language and the implementation of powerful word choice, Wordsworth is able to portray nature as an integral force. Versatile in its essence, nature is displayed as a physical, emotional, spiritual, and imaginative force, carrying huge significance for each individual in daily life. Through such direct comparison of how nature is portrayed in this poem, it becomes readily apparent that the natural world often plays a major part in literature. Whether it be an indirect reference to nature in a text, or an entire piece of literature inspired simply by the sight of the natural world, it is undeniable that nature and literature go hand in hand.

Works Cited

Linley, Margaret. "Lecture Two: William Wordsworth, I wandered lonely as a cloud." Simon Fraser University, English 115W, 17 May 2021, https://sfu.zoom.us/rec/share/kESps2tovXq26RAK8Feu-PUd7iYOmJOnWopg-LE3uS2IEbI1yXb_r_rjCn92ccQ.pgV6f0-2tjvJetcZ. Accessed 18 May 2021.

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