

## Lecture 3: Selected Romantic Poetry

### The Analysis of William Wordsworth's "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" (1807)

*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.*

*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.*

*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:*

*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.*

The poem under analysis is an expression of admiration to nature. It includes a number of references to principles of Romanticism, which are depicted as follows:

In the first stanza the speaker compares himself to a cloud and indicates that his position is in the sky, on top of all other creatures. He creates a bond with nature wherein he proclaims his belonging to it (by identifying with the cloud) and asserts his individualist aspect as he distances himself of all other human beings and of culture. At the end of the stanza he mentions the daffodils to which he is attracted, he describes them as a "host" which is significant of a company.

In the second stanza the speaker describes the daffodils along the bay of the lake. He compares them to stars that shine and twinkle and marvels at their large number, which he says is "never-unending", then he makes the second personification where he considers them as human beings that are dancing and "tossing their heads".

In the third stanza the speaker muses at the beauty of the daffodils, which are more glittering than the waves of the lake, then he expresses his extreme happiness to be in "such a jocund company", which makes the third personification of the flowers. The speaker clearly identifies with the natural world as the only company and refuge he needs. He first refers to the daffodils as a host like human beings, then describes them as having heads, and third as a company of friends. Clearly the natural world represents a better friend to the speaker than the civilized world. The principles of Romanticism that can be identified in this poem are individualism and isolation, refuge in nature, nature as a mirror of human nature, and the rejection of the world of organized social structures in favor of the natural world.

The final stanza includes the elements of imagination and inspiration. The speaker returns to his couch but his mind still "wanders" in the sky over the daffodils. He refers to imagination when he says "they flash upon that inward eye" and shows that it makes him happy "my heart with pleasure fills". This stanza shows that imagination as a main aspect of romantic writing is a key to escapism towards a beautiful world of nature.

### **Suggestions for Further Reading:**

Mortad-Serir, Ilhem. *Romantic Poetry for Analysis*. Algeria, Alqarii. 2017

Wordsworth, William, Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Lyrical Ballads and Other Poems*. London: Wordsworth Editions, 2003. Print.

**Analysis of William Blake's "The Chimney Sweeper"**

*When my mother died I was very young,  
And my father sold me while yet my tongue  
Could scarcely cry " 'weep! 'weep! 'weep! 'weep!"  
So your chimneys I sweep & in soot I sleep.*

*There's little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head  
That curled like a lamb's back, was shaved, so I said,  
"Hush, Tom! never mind it, for when your head's bare,  
You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair."*

*And so he was quiet, & that very night,  
As Tom was a-sleeping he had such a sight!  
That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned, & Jack,  
Were all of them locked up in coffins of black;*

*And by came an Angel who had a bright key,  
And he opened the coffins & set them all free;  
Then down a green plain, leaping, laughing they run,  
And wash in a river and shine in the Sun.*

*Then naked & white, all their bags left behind,  
They rise upon clouds, and sport in the wind.  
And the Angel told Tom, if he'd be a good boy,  
He'd have God for his father & never want joy.*

*And so Tom awoke; and we rose in the dark  
And got with our bags & our brushes to work.  
Though the morning was cold, Tom was happy & warm;  
So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm.*

**William Blake** wrote poetry against child labour. He thought that this phenomenon was one of the biggest atrocities of industrialization. For him, a child who has to work grows into a corrupted adult. The poem in hand is presented in the voice of a little boy who cleans chimneys with other children.

In the first stanza the speaker explains the tragic living conditions he has to experience as a young child hardly able to speak and who is sold by his father because he was an orphan. In the next stanza he soothes his friend Tom Dacre whose hair was shaved against his will. The two stanzas show the struggles and pains of the children who were living away from their families, often orphans and exploited.

The third stanza highlights the principle of imagination using the dream to compare the chimney to a black coffin that brings death to the children. The coffin is opened by an angel that sends the children to paradise where they are happy. Paradise is presented in a plain and mountain and sky (the landscape). After the dream Tom wakes up happy and warm and is ready to go to work. Apart from the initial theme which is child labor, the poem in hand includes the principle of childhood innocence and the reflection of human nature in the natural world. The children find peace and happiness and the innocence of the angel in heaven. The landscape also represents freedom and escape from the industrial city where the children have to clean chimneys. Finally, the poem also includes the aspect of imagination which is the key to freedom in this dream.

### **Assignment**

Read the poem entitled "Love's Philosophy" by Percy Bysshe Shelley and write an essay on the depiction of the principles of Romanticism in this poem