

The Beauty of “Being Alone” in I wandered Lonely As a Cloud

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Abstract: As a great Romantic poet, Wordsworth has successfully written down lots of poems about nature, *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud* included. Wordsworth well depicts a picture about the contrast between the depression of the wanderer “I” and the glee of the daffodils in groups in it. It is quite clear that the limit between them fades away gradually. At last, they even mix together and become a whole unity. However, no matter which state they are in, the sense of being lonely stands out more than the happiness of the group and its beauty is shown now and then. When they are clearly separated initially, they are independent but they are also part of the whole, the contrast between them shows the beauty of being lonely led by matched nature and dynamic actions. Later on, they are mixed together and there’s the harmony and comfort caused by their combination, which shows the higher level aesthetic beauty of being lonely that can only be got but not seen.

1. Introduction

Changing from a radical writer deeply influenced by French Revolution to a well-known conservative writer speaking for Romanticism, William Wordsworth depicts a quiet and vivid England, focusing on the animals, natural scenery and ordinary human beings’ ordinary life. Wordsworth seldom writes with complicated words. All the words he adopts are common ones in ordinary communications. Wordsworth always talks about things that people are quite familiar with: a butterfly flying around, a skylark flying into the sky, a cuckoo shouting in spring, a lass cutting the grain... However, with further reading, different feelings deep in mind would be awakened: the butterfly recalls the memory of playing with sister in childhood; the skylark is compared with nightingale and becomes a symbol of challenge and courage as well as God’s messenger; the cuckoo’s crying stimulates so much happiness; the lass working is solitary but she is encouraging others with her sincere singing... No matter how ordinary the things are, when they become part of Wordsworth’s works, they can all stimulate the resonance from the readers’ inner heart, which comes out silently with the flow of the great poet’s description and would stay there with lasting fragrance that would smell stronger and stronger with the development of time.

All these holds true for his poem *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*, in which Wordsworth well depicts the sense of being lonely calmly. No one sends out any sound here, but just dancing with those daffodils silently, the beauty of being lonely will infect everyone. It doesn’t offer a complex story, it just depicts a lonely character wandering around the vales and hills, encountering a host of daffodils and going further to talk about what influences these flowers will lead to. Just as what Wordsworth says about writing poems, “I have said that each of these poems has a purpose... it is to follow the fluxes and refluxes of the mind when agitated by the great and simple affections of our nature”, in this poem, he talks about quite simple affections of loneliness caused by seeing a crowd of daffodils in a very natural chronological order, but this loneliness would not lead to that painful sense coming under normal conditions, instead, it arouses a great sense of beauty.[1]

2. Image of Being Alone

Wordsworth always emphasizes the importance of writing about ordinary people’s ordinary life in ordinary language, which he proves with real action of putting it into practice. Wordsworth never gives up concentrating on nature and ordinary life. In fact, nature is the most ordinary thing in the

world where ordinary life is based on. Northrop Frye says that “Nature is a better teacher than books, and one finds one’s lost identity with nature in moments of feeling in which one is penetrated by the sense of nature’s huge and mighty forms”.[1] What Wordsworth believes and does completely agrees with what Frye says. In his works, he successfully proves how important and mighty nature is for a poet. Especially in his great poem *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*, Wordsworth makes such a good use of the contrast between the images from the nature and the image of the main character that the hero’s being lonely is shown out so clearly and vividly.

As is known to all, English language attaches much importance to the predicate verb, which embodies and determines the tense, voice as well as meaning of the whole sentence. Thus, there are lots of verbs in English, which consist of quite a big number of synonyms with only subtle differences. The first verb appearing in the whole poem *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud* is “wander”, which is connected with the action of walking, but whose synonyms like “run”, “walk”, “stroll” and “loaf” etc. have not been used here, because no other word can be so exactly used here. “Wander” is a kind of walking, but the connotation inside is walking around “aimlessly” with confusion. Wordsworth sets up the main figure as a lonely wanderer who knows nothing about what he would do and where he would go next moment, which agrees totally with “being aimless”. Cloud is a form of water, but unlike the normal water, it never has fixed form. Describing “water” in different forms is always the favorite of writers for water can be easily changed into different forms as steam, ice and cloud etc. “Water” is where life originates and what life relies on. As long as the image of water is adopted, the sense of life rises. Among all these forms, “cloud” is the most suitable to be matched with the lonely wanderer because just like the wanderer, “cloud” never keeps a stable image. With the verb “wander”, “I” is compared to “cloud”, together bringing out a vivid lonely image.

“I” in the poem is a wandering image walking high over the “vales and hills”. Usually, the mountains and valleys will appear in literary works but not vales and hills, for the former images are connected with strength and energy while the latter two are not so great things deserving much attention. However, they demonstrate well how lonely the character is here. It is said that “until we find a way to know and acknowledge to ourselves the true causes of our repressed wounds, fears, guilty desires and unresolved conflicts, we hang onto them in disguised, distorted, and self-defeating ways”.[2] If one is full of thoughts, one would not be able to care about the outside world. It’s obvious that this wanderer is not so interested in life and he is strongly lonely at that right moment for he is like a cloud, furthermore, he is “floating”. “Float” is a verb used together with water or other liquid, but it is seldom used to modify human beings. Just as “wander” above, “float” also emphasizes the loafing state of the aimless wanderer, he is like that water never in fixed form, and he is so soft and lack of strength. Only when one is empty in mind can he notice every detail around him because he dares not to look into the real desire and wound in mind, he will try to repress them. Then there’s no need for the writer to describe such strong ones as mountain and valley. Though it seems that the contrast between the strength of the mountains and valleys and the floating of a single individual would be stronger than that between the vales and hills and the single one, judging from another perspective, even the weaker one can be noticed, the stronger ones would never be missed. Thus, there’s a stronger sense of contrast to depict the loneliness. “I” is really vacant, no one is around, and the lonely image can nowhere be shown better.

Actually, dynamic actions like wandering and floating as well as images of water and cloud are directly connected with the sense of being lonely. However, in the poem here, quite a lot of other images can also display that being lonely so well, the only necessary thing is to make a small contrast or comparison. “I” walked lonely, all things concerned with “I” are embodied in singular forms, but everything around in the outside world are in plural forms: “vales and hills”, “a crowd of, a host of” golden daffodils, “continuous” stars... Looking at them separately, one would just feel that it’s so natural to talk about some individual in singular form and there’s nothing special for bringing out so many crowds, but when these images are put abreast, there is a special effect. Compared with that “floating cloud”, the daffodils are stretching in never-ending line. So many words and phrases used to describe the sense of “being in large numbers, being a lot” are adopted in

the poem to describe the outside, especially those daffodils. The repetition of phrases almost in the same meanings are together to enhance the tone of that contrast between “being accompanied by so many bright and jocund ones” and “being wandered like a cloud”. Large groups of daffodils are growing there along the margin of a bay and they are “continuous”, which means continuing without any “breaks”. There’s no need to go to any more direct expressions of the feelings or emotions in the poem, just a quick look at these comparisons and contrasts would make one clear about the difference between those ones who have companions and the “I” who has no one else to be around. All these are typical examples of being lonely.

3. Beauty of Being Alone

All images in Wordsworth’s *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud* carve out the sense of being lonely. No one would say “being lonely is wonderful”. Even in the first part, the strong contrast between the wanderer’s loneliness and the crowded outside still leads to certain repression. But initiated by the appearance of the daffodils, it begins to fade away. In the ending, it completely goes to the opposite relaxation, comfort and happiness, during which a sense of beauty stands out. Beauty can be simply understood as the good-looking appearance and it can also be about values, thoughts, influences deep inside. The “being lonely” here contains beauty from both angles, which is perfectly embodied and which is sure to inspire and encourage all the readers who are lucky enough to meet with it.

While talking about aesthetics, Hegel describes it as “philosophy of art on beauty”. He divides the “beauty” into the natural one and the artistic one and he supports that aesthetics focuses on the second part.[3] This “natural beauty” is almost equal to common understanding of beauty from the relatively superficial perspective, that is, what looks beautiful, which will satisfy the sense of seeing. Then when it goes to aesthetics, the philosophical beauty, what is important would be the feeling and thoughts it causes and even the influence it brings. However, no matter how beauty is considered and analyzed, it should give the feeling of being comfortable and harmonious.

In *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*, Wordsworth writes about the beautiful natural sceneries. Though “I” is walking lonely, “I” suddenly meets with a large crowd of golden daffodils. This color “golden” is excellent. “I” is a lonely wanderer in emptiness. This wandering is like the floating of cloud, formless and colorless. Then, things around add up the color “green” and lead to a sense of life. Though “green” doesn’t appear directly, it’s not strange if the background of the whole poem is regarded as green. Because green is commonly regarded as the symbolic color of life, the life sense is strengthened naturally here, but there is still some lack of vividness for life is dry only in cold color. Then, Wordsworth makes use of the color golden, making up for this shortage. Although “golden” is a common color for daffodil in England, the specific mention of it really means a lot. It’s natural for human beings to take things that they are quite familiar with for granted, so when all know that the daffodils should be golden, the poet wouldn’t bother to write it down. Its adoption here means there must be something special. “Golden” is a quite warm color, with the contrast between it and others, the sense of vividness comes out. Furthermore, in literary works, water, especially running water is with a strong sense of life. Matched with the never ending daffodils is the margin of the bay which is “beside the lake, beneath the trees”. The water in the lake is not as energetic as the running water, but they are livelier than the stationary ones. Because there’s wind, the daffodils are fluttering and the waves are dancing. With a harmonious atmosphere created by the balance between cold and warm colors, moving and stationary water, there’s indication of hope for the lonely wanderer. Though it’s not easy to recognize the beauty in this being lonely for it is with a sad sense, it can be agreed that if there were lack of it, the whole natural beauty would not be complete. Though they are not mixed into one, they form the whole as independent but connected and indispensable fragments. They demonstrate that harmonious and natural beauty together.

Based on the way paved by natural beauty, the actions of the outside also demonstrate the beauty of being lonely through the same contrast between the actions of the single individual and the crowds. “I” is wandering and floating singly, but the daffodils are in harmony with thousands of companions. Compared with the “wandering”, the daffodils are “fluttering and dancing”, “tossing

their heads in sprightly dance”, the “sparkling waves” are “in glee”. “Glee” and “sprightly” are related with “happiness”, but “happy” is just about feelings and it is concerned with a stationary state, while the others are both concerned with feelings and actions. “Flutter” and “toss” are about continual actions, both showing the duration of actions, which means energy of life, agreeing with the atmosphere of the whole - it is sedate, not so noisy and strong. The outside is in “happiness”, and when “happy” is changed into “glee” and “dancing, fluttering and tossing sprightly”, that dynamic sense of life is added. The lonelier the wanderer is, the stronger the feeling of happiness around would be. When one is vacant and pensive, the strong contrast between the lonely inside and the active outside would usually lead to two opposite results: the lonely one may be defeated and give up the hope; or he would be stimulated and go to the opposite, he would stand up and fight against the bad mood. Fortunately, “I” chooses the latter, instead of giving up facing directly the daffodils in strong contrast to the loneliness, “I” “gazed and gazed” them, then the jocund company flashes into the mind, and “I” doesn’t feel empty and sad anymore. All here are again in harmony, and they well show the beauty from the meeting between being lonely for a single individual and being happy for a large group. If the correct and positive way is chosen, the happiness of the group will wash away the loneliness of the individual. With actions here, the beauty goes closer from the superficial one that can be seen to the profound one that can be felt. But still, both two sides are obviously separate, they are connected as a unity but also not mixed into one. They together demonstrate the beauty coexisting between the individual and the groups.

Then, it goes to the highest beauty, that is, the completely Abstract one - feeling of comfort and harmony that can only be felt and not seen. In the poem, it is reflected through the effect led by seeing golden daffodils while wandering, which totally changes the depressing mood into a happy and relaxing one. The strong contrast between the beginning, “I wandered lonely as a cloud”, and the ending, “then my heart with pleasure fills and dances with the daffodils”, clearly shows the process of coming out from depression to sincere happiness in harmony and calmness.[4] What is important here is that kind of aesthetic sense in peace. Though it is not described directly, the disturbance coming together with the loneliness of the wanderer is quite easily felt in the first stanza - what else but the disagreement with the outside world would drive a poet enter the isolated wilderness in vales and hills without any other companions. “I” pursues calmness and relaxation. It’s lucky that “I” really gets them at last. Though “I” is still lonely at last, but “being lonely” is totally different from the initial one: the initial “being lonely” is not pleasant, “I” is forced to choose it, it’s obvious that “I” then is one inferior without hope; while when it approaches the ending, that “being lonely” is changed into one with a strong life sense, it shows a kind of rebellious spirit with confidence and strength - even though “I” is still a lonely one being accompanied by no one else, “I” keeps that memory of the “jocund” daffodils, “they flash upon that inward eye which is the bliss of solitude”, “I” can defeat all the troubles and “I” is strong enough now.[4]

“Being lonely with no one to share” arises to be the big trouble at the beginning, in strong contrast to the groups of daffodils giving out glare of life in happiness. The sadness caused by “being lonely” is compared with the happiness shared by the groups. Then the beauty coming out from their contrast is more at a superficial level, because that beauty has less to do with satisfaction in mind but agrees more with the enjoyment of eye seeing. But at the last part, they are combined together. The happiness of the daffodils is kept in the poet’s inner mind. When “I” meets with sadness again, they come out from the inner heart as bliss, directly arousing a quiet peace and satisfaction. In appearance, the wandering poet is still single, while “I” has already become different. The happiness of the daffodils is not on the opposite of “I” any more. It is unified with “I” and becomes part of “I”. The beauty that the lonely sees becomes the beauty that the lonely feels and even contains. As long as “I” thinks of it, “I” will dance with the daffodils. This lonely one here becomes mixture of the single individual and the group’s happiness, they are really in harmony and they make everyone feel comfortable and satisfied. Being lonely in form, happiness coming from the accompanying of the crowds of daffodils in glee is upgraded and the sense of beauty originating from their contrast and comparison before, now becomes the beauty of “being lonely” itself.

4. Conclusion

Wordsworth never makes use of those flatulent words full of deliberate decorations. He just puts those ordinary words coming from ordinary life into his works. All these hold true for his great poem, *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*, in which the contrast between a single wandering individual and the large crowd of daffodils is clearly shown. Initially, the single wanderer is in a very depressing and bad mood. However, the wanderer begins to care about the world outside later and look for the beauty of the outside world as a compensation for the sadness deep in heart. As two opponent factors, they are in conflicts with each other at first, and the beauty is shown in their conflicts, being lonely is an independent but unavoidable element in this beauty. Then when it goes to the last part, the natural beauty and dynamic beauty are lifted higher into the aesthetic beauty because the individual and the group are mixed together they form a unity in which they can never be separated. Being lonely at last goes to a harmonious, perfect beauty.

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