

# I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud



## POEM TEXT

- 1 I wandered lonely as a cloud
- 2 That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
- 3 When all at once I saw a crowd,
- 4 A host, of golden daffodils;
- 5 Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
- 6 Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.
  
- 7 Continuous as the stars that shine
- 8 And twinkle on the milky way,
- 9 They stretched in never-ending line
- 10 Along the margin of a bay:
- 11 Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
- 12 Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.
  
- 13 The waves beside them danced; but they
- 14 Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
- 15 A poet could not but be gay,
- 16 In such a jocund company:
- 17 I gazed—and gazed—but little thought
- 18 What wealth the show to me had brought:
  
- 19 For oft, when on my couch I lie
- 20 In vacant or in pensive mood,
- 21 They flash upon that inward eye
- 22 Which is the bliss of solitude;
- 23 And then my heart with pleasure fills,
- 24 And dances with the daffodils.

daffodils lingeringly, without yet realizing the full extent of the positive effects of encountering them.

After the experience with the daffodils, the speaker often lies on the couch, either absent-minded or thoughtful. It is then that the daffodils come back to the speaker's imaginative memory—access to which is a gift of solitude—and fills the speaker with joy as his mind dances with the daffodils.



## THEMES



### NATURE AND HUMANITY

Considered one of the most significant examples of Romantic poetry, "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" explores the relationship between nature and humanity. In doing so, it makes two key points. Firstly, it argues that humanity is not separate from nature, but rather part of it. And secondly, it suggests that the natural world—and a strong bond with it—is essential to human happiness. Though the reader might be fooled by the suggestion of solitude in the title, this is an optimistic poem with a positive outlook on the world. This happiness is drawn from the speaker's interaction with nature, in turn encouraging the reader to appreciate the natural majesty that is all around them.

The poem introduces the idea of loneliness in the first line, but the speaker is not really alone at all. The speaker is in the presence of "a host of golden daffodils," whose delicate "dancing" in the wind has a long-lasting effect on the speaker's mind. This set-up introduces a sense of togetherness between humanity (represented by the speaker) and nature (represented by the daffodils). And though this togetherness is partly rendered by the [personification](#) of the daffodils that runs throughout the poem—they are "dancing" in every stanza—the speaker pre-emptively flips this personification on its head in the very first line. Here, the speaker compares himself to a natural element: a cloud. So, the human component of the poem is like nature, and the natural component is like humanity. They are, in a word, together.

The poem suggests that this togetherness is something instinctive, and sometimes obvious only in hindsight. It's clear that the beauty of the daffodils had an instant impact on the speaker—which is why the speaker "gazed and gazed"—but it was only later, when the experience "flashed" again in the speaker's mind, that the speaker realized its full significance. In this quiet moment, the speaker draws on the experience of the daffodils as an avenue to happiness. That is, everything that the daffodils represent—joy, playfulness, survival, beauty—"fills" the speaker with "bliss" and "pleasure." In the speaker's mind, the



## SUMMARY

The speaker walks alone, similar to a solitary cloud in the sky floating over hills and valleys. Suddenly, the speaker sees a long and bustling row of daffodils. They are near the lake and the trees and flutter and shift as they are blown by the breeze.

Comparing the daffodils to stars in the sky, the speaker notes how the flowers seem to go on without ending, alongside a bay. The speaker guesses there are ten thousand or so daffodils, all of their heads moving as if they were dancing.

Near the daffodils, the waves are glinting on the bay. But the daffodils seem more joyful to the speaker than the waves. A poet couldn't help being cheerful, says the speaker, in the cheerful company of the daffodils. The speaker stares at the

speaker is again dancing “with the daffodils.” The poem, then, is arguing that communion with nature is not just a momentary joy, but something deeper and long-lasting. The reader is left with the distinct impression that, without these types of experiences with nature, the speaker would be returned to a genuine loneliness only hinted at by the title.

Stanzas 2 and 3 also make it clear to the reader that the togetherness described above is, of course, not solely about daffodils, but rather about nature more generally. “The stars” and “the sparkling waves” are both mentioned, suggesting a series of links between the smaller, less noticeable elements of the natural world (like the daffodils), humankind (like the speaker), and the wider universe (the stars). All are presented as a part of nature; though they are different, they are all in communion with one another. However, people have to make an effort to notice this and to engage with the natural world like the speaker does. The poem, then, is an argument for active engagement with nature—a message perhaps even more important now than it was at the time, given humanity’s wide-ranging effects on the planet it inhabits.

#### Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Line 1
- Lines 2-24



### MEMORY AND IMAGINATION

“I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud” argues for a strong connection between experience, imagination, and language. The poem itself is a memory, focused on bringing the speaker’s experience of seeing daffodils back to life on the page through the concentrated power of the imagination. Like nature, the imagination was an integral part of the poetic universe of the Romantics, and in this poem, the speaker shows the way in which a strong imagination—using the “inward eye” of the mind—can bring back pleasant memories, create joy in the present, and even pass joy along to others.

The poem is told retrospectively, with all the verbs up until the final stanza in the past tense: the speaker is looking back on an experience from the past. It is, then, an effort on the speaker’s part not just to recall an experience, but to breathe new life into it through the imagination. The speaker doesn’t only want to acknowledge the experience, but somehow give it life again and, in turn, conjure that same joyful feeling.

The success of this goal depends on the speaker and the reader working together. The speaker strives to bring their experience with the daffodils into life on the page, and the reader is asked to use their imagination to make this work. The reader, then, is called on to use their own “inward eye,” just as the speaker describes in the final stanza. Primarily, this interplay between the speaker’s imagination and the reader’s imagination is dependent on the [personification](#) of the daffodils that runs

throughout the poem. The speaker describes the daffodils as having human characteristics, which are not meant to be taken literally but instead *imaginatively*. For example, the “dancing” of the daffodils, referenced in every stanza, is actually just the effect of the wind. But dancing, of course, is an inherently joyful activity. The speaker perceives visual similarities between the daffodils’ movement and dance, and this imaginative leap deepens the speaker’s own connection to the experience. In essence, imagining the daffodils are dancing makes *the speaker* feel more alive by witnessing the life in everything else.

The speaker also projects human emotion onto the daffodils: “jocund company” (jocund means cheerful). Of course, the daffodils don’t experience the world in this way—the speaker is seeing their own state of mind reflected back in the visual effect of the flowers. That imaginative leap heightens the experience, arguably making the speaker feel a stronger connection to nature. The poem in turn asks the reader to go through the same process. The reason for doing so is clear from the final stanza. Here, the speaker describes being in a “vacant” or “pensive” mood— in other words, these are times in which the speaker feels disengaged and detached from the world. Of course, the imagination is the speaker’s salvation—the image of the daffodils comes rushing back, and even further, the speaker imaginatively goes back to the daffodils and “dances” with them. The poem, then, argues that such imaginative acts can have positive effects for the reader, too. Encouraging the reader toward imagination becomes the justification for the use of personification, conceptualization, and poetic language that has come before. These choices weren’t just about *describing* the daffodils, but about engaging the reader’s imagination in experiencing them. Throughout, the speaker links imagination to happiness, particularly in its capacity to bring memories, if not *back* to life, into *new* life. The experience of the daffodils lives on in the speaker’s and then the reader’s imagination. “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud” is, then, an imaginative attempt to not just recreate the speaker’s experience, but to extend it into the mind of the reader. The poem argues that this process is an important part of what it means to be human and, moreover, happy.

#### Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 6-12
- Lines 19-23



## LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

### LINES 1-2

*I wandered lonely as a cloud  
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,*

The poem begins by establishing a sense of isolation—the set-

up that the visual shock of the daffodils will later break through. Whereas the rest of the poem functions through personifying nature, the first line actually does the reverse. The speaker likens themselves—or specifically, their "lonely" way of wandering—to a cloud. The effect of this [simile](#) is similar to that of the later [personification](#) of the daffodils: both serve to link the speaker and nature together. The speaker is a stand-in for humanity more generally, so this first line establishes that the poem is about the relationship between mankind and the natural world. The comparison suggests that the speaker is walking about without any particular purpose, building on the idea that clouds are aimless (which in itself is a kind of built-in personification that often occurs when people look up at the sky).

The language of the first line is delicate and simple, establishing a sense of calm that is disrupted by the ecstatic joy of the daffodils' sudden appearance. The iambic [tetrameter](#) suggests a steady but not urgent walking pace, and the [consonance](#) of /l/ sounds links "lonely" and "cloud" together, reinforcing the idea of clouds as somehow isolated figures (of course, this is very weather-dependent!).

The second line continues this airiness, with the [enjambment](#) at the end of line 1 allowing the two lines together to breathe easily. The /l/ sounds are picked up again in "floats," "vales," and "hills," but as this is a gentle sound, it only serves to underscore the calm atmosphere of the opening. This is, of course, a short lull that is soon to be interrupted.

### LINES 3-6

*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.*

Lines 3 and 4 introduce the central focus of the poem—the daffodils. Daffodils are bright yellow flowers that herald the beginning of spring in Britain (which is part of a weather area called the temperate climatic zone that includes four distinct seasons). Their sudden entrance into the poem—"all at once"—is in itself a way of representing the way they suddenly bloom and mark a distinct change between the seasons.

The speaker uses two different collective nouns to describe the daffodils, both of which are examples of [personification](#). From first sight, the speaker perceives something human—or, more accurately, something relevant to humanity—in the daffodils. Initially, the speaker describes the daffodils as "a crowd," emphasizing their abundance and how they seem to be jostling for sunlight and space. The speaker then modifies, perhaps clarifies, the use of "crowd" by employing "host." Essentially, this word means "a large number," but it also occurs in biblical usage to describe a group of angels. With angels being human-like creatures, the use of "host" both adds to the personification of the daffodils and gently suggests a sense of divinity. The use of

[assonance](#) in lines 3 and 4 underscores the sheer number of daffodils—the words are dominated by /o/ sounds, reinforcing this idea of abundance and crowdedness.

The final two lines of the stanza demonstrate that the daffodils, having appeared from nowhere, suddenly seem to be all over the place, wherever the speaker looks. Line 5 uses [caesura](#) to allow the speaker to point the reader's imagination towards the daffodils by setting them against the images of the "lake" and then the "trees."

Line 6 presents the first major variation in the meter, with a first-foot substitution that replaces the steady iambs that have come before with a [dactyl](#):

Flu-tter-ing | and danc | -ing in | the breeze

The rhythm here creates the sense of dance that is so important throughout the poem, lending the daffodils delicate but noticeable movement. The first foot here has an almost waltz-like feel—ONE-two-three.

### LINES 7-12

*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.*

Like the first, the second stanza begins with a [simile](#). This time, the speaker compares the daffodils with the stars in order to emphasize their sheer number. Just as on a good night the stargazer's view is full of stars, the daffodils seem never to end. Essentially, then, this stanza's main purpose is to expand on the sight of the daffodils. But the association with the stars also lends the daffodils a cosmic quality, supporting the idea that the speaker is witnessing something essential to existence itself—in this case, the natural world and its connection to humankind.

Both meter and sound contribute to this mind-bending sense of the universe in lines 7 and 8. The word "continuous" adds an extra syllable to the line, making the line read iamb-[anapest](#)-iamb-iamb:

Con-tin | u-ous as | the stars | that shine

The first word, then, embodies the idea of abundance, of thriving nature, through the extra syllable.

The combination of [sibilance](#) in line 7 and [assonance](#) in lines 7 and 8 develops the "twinkling" quality of the stars. The /s/ sounds across "continuous as," "stars," "shine," and the /i/ sounds of "continuous," "shine," "twinkle" and "milky" flash on and off like the stars in the night sky. This sonic effect mirrors the way the light is catching on the heads of the daffodils.

Lines 9 and 10 restate the seemingly never-ending sight of the daffodils, this time using assonant /e/ sounds to conjure the idea of the view being "stretched." Likewise, the [enjambment](#) at

the end of line 9 allows the continuous line of daffodils to be matched by the continuation of the poetic line.

Line 11 represents the speaker's [hyperbolic](#) attempt to guess at the number of daffodils in view. It is, of course, not a precise number, but one readily available in the speaker's mind that generally represents a large quantity.

Line 12 returns to the [personification](#) running throughout the poem, and reinstates the "dance" of the daffodils. The use of "tossing" personifies the daffodils by suggesting agency, in that it is a deliberate movement (rather than an effect of the wind). Likewise, the reference to dancing again gives the daffodils a degree of conscious decision-making. Of course, the speaker doesn't really think the daffodils are deliberately dancing. But the personification allows the speaker to read their own being into that of the daffodils--that is, to find common ground between their existence as a human and the lively existence of the flowers.

### LINES 13-18

*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:*

The third stanza mentions dancing in its first line, setting it apart from the others, in all of which dancing comes in the final line. It makes sense, because here the dancing belongs not to the daffodils, but to the waves. It is, then, another [personification](#), indicating that the speaker is reading intention and agency into everything they see in nature. The [caesura](#) in line 13 interrupts the image of the waves dancing and allows the speaker to state that the daffodils are superior in "glee" to the "sparkling waves." That is, though the waves seem joyful, the daffodils are even more so.

Lines 15 and 16 are seemingly light but actually contain the crux of the whole poem. That is, they state categorically the link between the daffodils and the speaker's happiness. The daffodils *seem* cheerful, and this mood passes on to the speaker. It's interesting, though, that the speaker uses the word "poet" rather than "person." The daffodils have the capacity to imbue a person with happiness, but, as the word choice implies, that person needs to have a certain sensibility and way of perceiving the world. In short, they need to be engaged with nature and ready to receive its sudden wonders, like the daffodils. Remember that the speaker is out for a walk in the countryside—the speaker has already chosen to place themselves in a more natural environment than a city or town. The poem, then, is an argument for this effort at connection with nature; it seems to suggest that any person must take on the sensibility of a poet in order to experience this kind of joy. In line 17, the [repetition](#) of "gazed" emphasizes the length of

time the speaker spends looking at the daffodils. The speaker is in no hurry at all. As this poem is told in the past tense, the rest of line 17 and line 18 can be read as an interjection from the poem's present, as the speaker offers commentary on their experience with the daffodils. It's an interesting moment, because it isn't as if the speaker hasn't made clear already that the daffodils had an important effect. The speaker here implies that the experience of the daffodils became even more important *afterwards*, and amounted to a kind of "wealth" (which calls back to the use of "golden" in line 4). The irresolution of this thought sets up the final stanza, with the colon suggesting that what follows will explain what the speaker is trying to say.

### LINES 19-24

*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 fourth stanza contextualizes the three that have come before. It aims to make sense of them, and to show the reader the deeper purpose behind the discussion of the daffodils. This stanza brings the poem into its present moment, with the speaker offering context for the memory that has come before. It makes clear that the experience of the daffodils was important for reasons beyond the immediate boost to the speaker's mood. The daffodils have a lingering positive effect.

As in the first stanza, the speaker is alone. Here, the speaker talks of being in either a "vacant" or "pensive" mood. "Vacant" can be taken to mean disconnected or absent-minded, whereas "pensive" is more akin to worry—both seem to be undesirable states. In these moments, the memory of the daffodils returns to the speaker, coming to visual life in the speaker's mind (the "inward eye"). As a result, the speaker is joyful and feels a deep, spiritual connection with the daffodils—the speaker figuratively joins them in their "dance" (which once again returns in the final line of the stanza).

Some context about Wordsworth's poetic practice is vital here. In the preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, which set out Wordsworth's early ideas about poetry, he writes: "I have said that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of reaction, the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind."

The "spontaneous overflow" was the original experience with the daffodils. But this experience gains its fullest value in the "solitude" mentioned in line 22, when these emotions—joy, cheerful abandon, connection to nature—can be "recollected"

and "contemplated." For Wordsworth, this process makes the emotion return in a kind of pure, spiritual form, to the point that it "actually exists in the mind." The poem, then, emphasizes the importance of the imagination to human experience. Here, the speaker draws upon the sensory joy of the daffodils and feels a union with nature through the act of imaginative contemplation. This adjusts the meaning of what has come before. Just as the experience outlined in the final stanza depends upon memory, the poem *itself* is a product of that active, imaginative remembering. That is, the beauty of what has come before is a way of showing the importance of imaginative interaction with the world.

The long vowels in lines 19 and 20 create a sense of moodiness and stasis, which is then disrupted by the sudden sound of the word "flash." This mimics the daffodils' reappearance in the speaker's mind, and links [assonantly](#) with "dances" and "daffodils." The flowers figuratively dance back into the speaker's mind and bring "pleasure;" this pleasure is not a sensual one, but something more spiritual and deeply felt.



## SYMBOLS



### DAFFODILS

It's obvious who the stars of the show in this poem are—the daffodils. The whole poem revolves around them, and any other images in the text are only there to support the overall impression of the daffodils.

The first aspect of the daffodils' symbolism exists outside any associations made in the poem. In the United Kingdom, the blooming of daffodils traditionally symbolizes the arrival of spring. So the daffodils in Wordsworth's poem *already* act as heralds of renewal, rebirth and new beginnings even before the poem adds its own associations or meanings to the flowers.

In "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud," the daffodils also represent nature's incredible capacity for beauty, and its ability to manifest that beauty in subtle and innovative ways. Accordingly, this symbolism drives part of the poem's implicit argument that people should take more notice of nature—that they should take their time, look more closely, and marvel at the natural world's incredible variety of forms.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:



## POETIC DEVICES

### PERSONIFICATION

[Personification](#) is so prominent within "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" that it can almost be considered the poem's "mode."

This device mainly functions by ascribing human emotions to the natural world. This is not a one-way exchange, however—it is part of an overall argument for a closer relationship between humanity and nature. In seeing elements of itself in nature, humanity can see itself as part of nature.

Three different aspects of nature are personified in the poem. The first personification occurs in the first line. It's subtle, because it's wrapped up in the speaker comparing themselves to a cloud—which is, in fact, the reverse of personification. But the speaker characterizes their "wandering" as "lonely," and specifically akin to the loneliness of "a cloud." In reality, loneliness is a human emotion and, of course, not one felt by clouds. This personification helps to link the human speaker with the natural environment in which they walk.

The main personification applies to the daffodils. They are described as a "crowd" and a "host" (the latter of which also has the subtle connotation of relating to angels), and on three occasions they are said to be "dancing." Dance is particularly important—people dance as an expression of joy, and/or as a method of togetherness. Dance has also played a key role in human history as a ritualistic expression of spirituality. As the poem is about joy, togetherness with nature, and a spiritual way of seeing humankind's place *in* nature, the projection of dancing movement onto the daffodils reinforces all of these ideas.

The third personification is in line 13, when the waves are also described as dancing. Here, there is a sense that the speaker is perceiving nature in motion, and though the daffodils "outdo" the waves in joyfulness, the overall effect is that the entire scene contains an essence fundamental to human happiness.

#### Where Personification appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "I wandered lonely as a cloud"
- **Lines 3-4:** "a crowd, / A host, of golden daffodils;"
- **Line 6:** "dancing"
- **Line 12:** "Tossing their heads in sprightly dance."
- **Lines 13-16:** "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:"
- **Line 24:** "dances with the daffodils."

### SIMILE

[Simile](#) occurs twice in "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud." The first instance is in the first line, when the speaker compares their own lonely wandering to a solitary cloud (presumably solitary, because otherwise the simile wouldn't make much sense). This is a simple usage that ties the speaker, as a human, to the natural environment.

The second simile is in line 7, when the daffodils are compared to the stars in the night sky. More specifically, the abundance of the daffodils—their continuousness—is likened to the seemingly limitless number of stars in the heavens. On the

most practical level, this simile highlights how many daffodils the speaker can see. But it also serves another important function: it links the daffodils with something more universal, tying together their beauty with the entire cosmology of existence. Of course, this has subtle religious connotations, linking the idea of natural abundance with concepts associated with the sky—religion, spirituality, the infinite, and so on.

#### Where Simile appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** “as a cloud”
- **Line 7:** “as the stars that shine”

## ASSONANCE

[Assonance](#) is used to great effect throughout “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud.” A prominent example occurs across lines 3 and 4, when an abundance of /o/ sounds signals the shocking and sudden sight of the numerous daffodils. The /o/s jostle for space, just as the daffodils do along the bay. The relevant words here are “crowd,” “host,” “golden” and “daffodils.”

In lines 7 and 8, /i/ sounds seem to blink on and off, mimicking the visual image of the stars twinkling in the night sky. The /i/ sound is contained in “continuous,” “shine,” “twinkle” and “milky”—all of which are conceptually tied to the image of stars. In the following line—line 9—the vowel sound changes to a long /e/, which develops the image of the daffodils “stretching,” seemingly without limit.

The use of the /a/ sound in “flash” (line 21) is a sudden disruption to the prior vowel sounds, and then chimes with “heart,” “dances,” and “daffodils” later in the stanza. It mimics the way in which the daffodils suddenly reappear in the speaker’s mind, and ties them together with the speaker’s “heart,” which reinforces the deep connection between nature and human happiness.

#### Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Lines 3-4:** “crowd, / A host, of golden daffodils;”
- **Lines 7-8:** “Continuous as the stars that shine / And twinkle on the milky”
- **Line 9:** “They stretched in never-ending line”
- **Line 21:** “flash”
- **Line 23:** “heart”
- **Line 24:** “dances,” “daffodils.”

## CONSONANCE

[Consonance](#) crops up throughout “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud.” In the first line, the /d/ sounds in “wandered” and “cloud” yoke these two words together, emphasizing a sense of aimless movement. The same sound in “golden daffodils” has a luxuriant ring to it, which ties into the idea of the (spiritual) “wealth” (line 18) to be found in nature.

There are also a number of /t/ sounds throughout the poem. The most prominent use is in “fluttering,” which then makes each later reoccurrence gently suggest of this motion. The /t/ sounds peak in the second stanza, which aptly concludes with the speaker estimating the number of daffodils as “ten thousand.” The use of “ten” here is not arbitrary, but rather confirms the link between the /t/ sound and the abundance of “dancing” daffodils. The choice of “tossing” and the “t” in “sprightly” develop this further.

In the same stanza, the /k/ sounds in “twinkle” and “milky way” draw them together conceptually. The delicateness of the sound evokes the idea of faint but perceptible light.

#### Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** “wandered,” “cloud”
- **Line 4:** “golden daffodils”
- **Line 6:** “tt”
- **Line 7:** “t,” “t”
- **Line 8:** “t,” “k,” “k”
- **Line 9:** “t”
- **Line 11:** “T”
- **Line 12:** “T,” “t”

## ALLITERATION

[Alliteration](#) is quite rare in “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud,” with Wordsworth generally opting for a combination of [assonance](#) and [consonance](#) to achieve the appropriate sonic effects.

In line 2, “high” and “hills” alliterate to create a sense of airiness that enhances the poem’s outdoor atmosphere.

In the third stanza, four words begin with /w/, two of which are “waves.” The repetition of the word is gently suggestive of the waves going in and out of the bay, whereas the sound of “what wealth” emphasizes the idea of spiritual nourishment.

By far the most significant alliterative moment occurs in the final line, when the speaker restates the link between “dances” and “daffodils.” The flowers have brought joy to the poet, and this last line represents a kind of purification of that joy. The use of /d/s has a musicality to it that evokes dancing, and as well as a child-like playfulness in keeping with a “heart” full of “pleasure.”

#### Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** “h,” “h”
- **Line 13:** “w”
- **Line 14:** “w”
- **Line 18:** “W,” “w”
- **Line 24:** “d,” “d”

## CAESURA

[Caesura](#) occurs in lines 4, 5, 13, 17 and 19.

In line 4, it allows the speaker to clarify and develop the image of the daffodils, particularly in relation to their [personification](#). The daffodils are both a "crowd" and a "host," which mean similar things—but host carries with it a subtle reference to the angelic order.

Line 5's caesura conjures the image of the speaker surveying the scene, marvelling at the sheer abundance of the daffodils.

In line 13, the caesura introduces another clarification, this time so the speaker can compare the relatively joyful appearance of the dancing waves with the even more brilliant look of the daffodils.

Line 17's caesura allows for the [repetition](#) of "gazed" and slows the pace down. This slowness emphasizes the amount of time that the speaker takes to look at the daffodils.

In line 19, the caesura is merely part of the last stanza's main function, which is to establish why the sight of the daffodils is so important—they bring joy through the imagination well after the specific event of seeing them.

#### Where Caesura appears in the poem:

- **Line 4:** “”
- **Line 5:** “”
- **Line 13:** “;”
- **Line 17:** “\_” “\_”
- **Line 19:** “”

## ENJAMBMENT

[Enjambment](#) occurs occasionally in "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud." It is found between lines 1 and 2, 7 and 8, 9 and 10, 13 and 14, 17 and 18, 19 and 20, and 21 and 22. All of the stanzas begin with two lines that are enjambed.

The first enjambment, between lines 1 and 2, gives space to the idea of loneliness—the cloud literally floats there at the end of the line, mimicking the speaker's isolation. A similar effect is achieved in the way line 7's enjambment adds emphasis to "shine."

Between 9 and 10, the enjambment conjures the sense of a "never-ending line." That is, the way the phrase stretches over the lines embodies the long line of daffodils in the speaker's view.

Line 13's enjambment allows for added emphasis at the beginning of line 14, with "out-did" coming out more forcefully.

The combination of the two enjambments in the final stanza allows for a more contemplative pace, as the speaker outlines the ongoing significance of experiencing the daffodils.

#### Where Enjambment appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "cloud"
- **Line 2:** "That"

- **Line 7:** "shine"
- **Line 8:** "And"
- **Line 9:** "line"
- **Line 10:** "Along"
- **Line 13:** "they"
- **Line 14:** "Out-did"
- **Line 17:** "thought"
- **Line 18:** "What"
- **Line 19:** "lie"
- **Line 20:** "In"
- **Line 21:** "eye"
- **Line 22:** "Which"

## SIBILANCE

[Sibilance](#) occurs primarily in the second and fourth stanzas, but shows up in the third stanza too.

In the second stanza, /s/ sounds are one of a small group of sounds that are bunched together in great number. They are found across "continuous as...stars...shine...stretched...thousand saw...glance...tossing...heads...sprightly...dance." In other words, /s/ is found in abundance—just like the daffodils. There is also a certain windiness to the way the /s/ sound forms in the voice, which here mimics the way the breeze makes the daffodils look like they are dancing.

In the third stanza, the effect is similar:

"waves...beside...danced...sparkling...waves...such...gazed...gazed...sho  
The /s/ sounds here lend the lines a sparkling quality that mirrors what the speaker is seeing.

In the final stanza, the /s/ sounds link with the key phrase: "bliss of solitude." Here, the speaker stakes out their position that solitude is an important part of human life, and it is in these solitary moments that the imagination can best function and, in turn, bring happiness. In lines 23 and 24, the sound of the poem fills up again with sibilance, mimicking the way the memory of the daffodils "fills" the speaker's "heart" with "pleasure."

#### Where Sibilance appears in the poem:

- **Line 7:** "s," "s," "s," "s," "sh"
- **Line 9:** "s"
- **Line 11:** "s," "s," "c"
- **Line 12:** "ss," "s," "s," "c"
- **Line 13:** "s," "s," "c"
- **Line 14:** "s," "s"
- **Line 16:** "s"
- **Line 17:** "z," "z"
- **Line 18:** "sh"
- **Line 20:** "s"
- **Line 22:** "ss," "s"
- **Line 23:** "s," "s"
- **Line 24:** "c," "s"

## POLYSYNDETON

[Polysyndeton](#) occurs just once in the poem, in lines 23 and 24. It doesn't have an especially obvious function, but does bring with it a lightness that is befitting of the idea of "dancing" (imaginatively) with "the daffodils." It partly helps to keep the meter in place, but as "and" is a fairly inconsequential word it also signifies a lightening of mood as the speaker revels in the memory of the daffodils.

### Where Polysyndeton appears in the poem:

- **Line 23:** "And"
- **Line 24:** "And"

## HYPERBOLE

[Hyperbole](#) occurs once in "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud." It can be found in line 11, when the speaker puts a number on the amount of daffodils. This number is most likely a significant exaggeration. It's a number that fits the meter and general sound patterning of the poem, but also one that *sounds* big. At the same time, it seems perhaps unlikely that the meadow actually held ten thousand flowers.

Of course, the speaker isn't being accidentally inaccurate. The use of "ten thousand" is a way to represent the sheer visual shock of the daffodils, which suddenly appear in their abundant yellow brightness. "Ten thousand" gives a sense of the speaker's sightline being suddenly filled by the sight of the flowers. The hyperbole captures the actual overwhelming feeling of encountering this field brimming with daffodils.

### Where Hyperbole appears in the poem:

- **Line 11:** "Ten thousand saw I at a glance,"



## VOCABULARY

**o'er** (Line 2) - A contraction of "over."

**vales** (Line 2) - Another word for valleys.

**host** (Line 4) - In this instance, "host" means a large gathering. Additionally, the word "host" is often used in biblical contexts to describe a group of angels, which hints at the idea of a divine presence here.

**daffodils** (Line 4, Line 24) - Daffodils are bright yellow flowers. Their blooming is associated with the beginning of spring.

**sprightly** (Line 12) - With a lively and bouncy energy.

**glee** (Line 14) - Extreme happiness.

**gay** (Line 15) - Happy and cheerful.

**jocund** (Line 16) - Light-hearted and cheerful.

**oft** (Line 19) - A contraction of "often."

**vacant** (Line 20) - Absent-minded, empty, or detached from the present.

**inward eye** (Line 21) - The mind's imagination.



## FORM, METER, & RHYME

### FORM

The form of "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" is relatively simple. The poem consists of four sestet (six-line stanzas), adding up to twenty-four lines in total. It is told in the past tense up until the final stanza, which means that the reader imaginatively participates in the speaker's memory as the speaker reconstructs it. For example, just as the daffodils appeared suddenly to the speaker, they also enter suddenly in line 4. Lines 3 till halfway through line 17 all develop the description of the daffodils, emphasizing their human-like dancing, their visual beauty, and their abundance.

Line 17 marks the main shift in the poem—when the speaker introduces a wider context as to why they feel the experience of the daffodils is important. The colon at the end of line 18—and this is the only stanza with an end like this—indicates that the fourth stanza will explain the nature of the "wealth" the speaker feels the daffodils have provided.

The final stanza, then, makes the poem's purpose clear. The speaker feels the rewards of the experience with the daffodils as an on-going process. The memory, brought to life by "solitude," brings back the daffodils to the speaker's imagination and fills the speaker with happiness. Solitude and the imagination, then, are shown to allow people access to a particular type of joy that is linked to experiences in the natural world.

### METER

The meter in "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" is consistently iambic [tetrameter](#), with a few careful and deliberate exceptions. Generally, the iambic tetrameter has an almost walking pace in line with the poem's main set-up: the speaker "wandering" in the countryside. The lines are mostly even and measured, similar to purposeful but unhurried footsteps.

The first variation of the iambic tetrameter occurs in line 6, in which the first foot is substituted for a [dactyl](#):

Flut-ter-ing | and dan- | -cing in | the breeze

This change emphasizes the movement contained in the word "fluttering," making it sudden. Likewise, the three syllables in the first foot have an almost waltz-like feel, anticipating the use of "dancing" throughout the poem.

Line 7 provides the next disruption of the meter, with an extra syllable in "continuous" making the line literally longer, which

mimics the long line of daffodils.

Line 12 has a [trochee](#) substituted in the first foot, serving a very similar function to the earlier substitution in line 6 and making the meter of the mirror the motion of the daffodils.

## RHYME SCHEME

The rhyme scheme follows a clear formula throughout the poem. Each stanza follows its own ABABCC scheme:

- Stanza 1: ABABCC
- Stanza 2: ABABCC
- Stanza 3: ABABCC
- Stanza 4: ABABCC

In each stanza, then, there is a concluding final couplet. The rhymes are strong and full throughout, which in part demonstrates the imaginative power of the speaker but also embodies the idea of "dance" that runs through the poem. The strictness of the pattern is like a sequence of dance moves, with just enough variation to keep it interesting.

In the first stanza, all of the end words relate to nature—though "crowd" is part of the speaker's personification of the daffodils. This helps to establish the outdoor setting of the poem and makes it clear that the natural world is a key part of the poem's meaning.

Similarly, the first four end words in the final stanza all help to establish the speaker's sense of solitude (though now indoors). This solitude isn't portrayed negatively, but rather as part of the imaginative process. The rhymes, then, help the reader sense the shift in mood as the poem moves from relaying the memory of the daffodils to showing why that memory is important. Fittingly, the last couplet allows for the poem to end on the star of the show—the daffodils themselves.



## SPEAKER

The poem is spoken in the first-person throughout, and indeed deals with the speaker's own memory. The speaker has selected this memory as significant, and it is up to the poem to justify why. The poem begins and ends with the speaker alone—"lonely" in line 1 and "solitude" in line 22. But this isn't meant to be perceived negatively. In fact, the speaker's initial isolation is part of what allows them to be so attentive to nature, and the solitude in the end is actually a state of "bliss." Part of the poem's argument, then, is about the importance of a certain type of solo contemplation.

The first-person pronoun is used in every stanza, emphasizing that this is a poem that hinges on personal experience. That choice isn't to exclude the reader, but rather to encourage them to engage with the natural world and the imagination in the same way the speaker does.

The speaker is also a poet, and so it's fair to interpret the poem as being Wordsworth's own thoughts, though the poem itself does not state this explicitly. Indeed, the daffodils encounter is well-documented as having happened on a walk he shared with his sister in England's Lake District. Likewise, the final stanza, which explains why the daffodils are so important, closely aligns with the poetic philosophy set out by Wordsworth elsewhere (in his *Lyrical Ballads*). The speaker/Wordsworth believes that solitude is integral to the imagination, and that imaginative contemplation is essential to what it means to be human.



## SETTING

The poem is, on the one hand, set outdoors in the countryside. It's well-documented that the poem was inspired by one of Wordsworth's walks in England's Lake District, but the text of the poem doesn't state that explicitly. Accordingly, the poem's outdoors doesn't have to be limited to the specific place that gave Wordsworth the idea. The reader gets a clear sense that the countryside scene is well away from any other sign of humanity—hence the speaker's isolation—and is in a landscape with "vales and hills." Likewise, it is a pleasant climate and is early spring. Daffodils, in fact, are often the herald of spring in places like England, and their sudden shock of yellow is a remarkable sight.

On the other hand, the poem's setting is also the speaker's psyche, what the speaker describes as an "inward eye." The poem is told in the first-person past tense until the final stanza, which situates the reader within the speaker's memory. This figurative setting is clarified at the end when the speaker discusses the merits of this kind of imaginative memory which, the reader now understands, they have been witnessing at work and even participating in.



## CONTEXT

### LITERARY CONTEXT

William Wordsworth is one of the most recognizable names in English poetry and was a key figure of the Romantic poets. Generally speaking, key principles of Romanticism were a close relationship with nature, an emphasis on the importance of the imagination, solitude and contemplation, and the significance of emotion. These tenets were a reaction against certain ideals of the Enlightenment, principally reason, over-intellectualization, and spiritual confinement.

This poem, in fact, neatly encapsulates Wordsworth's poetic philosophy, which he describes in the *Lyrical Ballads* (a key Romantic text published with Samuel Coleridge in 1798): "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility." The Romantic label generally groups Wordsworth together with

poets Samuel Coleridge, John Keats, Percy Shelley, William Blake, Lord Byron and Thomas de Quincey. As with many such terms, it was coined by critics *after* these writers' lives and masks significant differences between some of them. Essayists such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau also wrote on similar Romantic themes, and Rousseau in particular emphasized the natural world in the same way that Wordsworth does here.

Wordsworth was one of England's most popular poets throughout his lifetime, and he became Poet Laureate in 1843.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The poem was begun in 1804, but the particular walk that it is based on took place in 1802. There are two key events important to the context here. The first is the French Revolution in 1789 which, though of course it took place in France, had a strong effect on the intellectual and ideological atmosphere of early 19th-century England. Its purported ideals of liberty, brotherhood and equality were considered noble ambitions, and Wordsworth supported them initially. He and Coleridge were even at one point suspected of being French spies.

The second piece of key historical context is less an event than a gradual but sweeping change that came over much of Europe from about the 1760s onwards—the Industrial Revolution. This period saw a rapid increase in mechanized labor, pollution, and population density, which in part informed the Romantic emphasis on people somehow returning to, or communing with, the natural environment. This poem, of course, is a clear example of that emphasis.



## MORE RESOURCES

### EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- [A Reading](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mQnyV2YWsto) — The poem read by Jeremy Irons. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mQnyV2YWsto>)

- [Daffodils at Ullswater](https://www.visitcumbria.com/pen/daffodils-glencoyne-bay/) — Photos and video of daffodils at the actual location mentioned in Wordsworth's account of the walk. (<https://www.visitcumbria.com/pen/daffodils-glencoyne-bay/>)
- [Nature and Wordsworth](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EGn1llx_3o4) — A short BBC clip about Wordsworth's early relationship with nature. ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EGn1llx\\_3o4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EGn1llx_3o4))
- [Biography and other poems](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/william-wordsworth) — A useful resource from TPOetry Foundation. (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/william-wordsworth>)
- [Preface to Lyrical Ballads](http://www.english.upenn.edu/~jenglish/Courses/Spring2001/040/preface1802.html) — The preface to Coleridge and Wordsworth's 1798 book, *Lyrical Ballads*. (<http://www.english.upenn.edu/~jenglish/Courses/Spring2001/040/preface1802.html>)

## LITCHARTS ON OTHER WILLIAM WORDSWORTH POEMS

- [Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802](#)
- [She Dwelt among the Untrodden Ways](#)
- [The Solitary Reaper](#)
- [The World Is Too Much With Us](#)



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