

CHAPTER 2 ANALYSIS OF THE SELECTED ENGLISH POEMS

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH'S "DAFFODILS"

Background of the Poet

William Wordsworth was born on April 7, 1770 in Cockermouth, Cumberland in England. Both his parents, John and Ann, died when he was young. He was brought up and became educated with the help of his relatives. He went to St. John's College, University of Cambridge. As a young boy, he developed interest in nature and was said to have visited places with scenic beauty during his vacations. William Wordsworth was reported to have begun writing poetry as a boy, but none of the works was noticed until 1793 with the publication of *An Evening walk with Descriptive Sketches*. Just a few copies were sold. Wordsworth later met Samuel Taylor Coleridge who had admired his earlier poetry and both collaborated in writing some poems. He had been a victim of several criticisms but he never gave up on his definition of poetry as "emotion collected in tranquillity." He later became one of the greatest poets who celebrate and idolise nature. This attitude to celebrate Nature is known as Romanticism. William Wordsworth was one of the leading proponents of the Romantic tradition.

Subject Matter

The poem "Daffodils" is about the poet's experience while on a lonely walk. He discovers a stretch of lush daffodils, a beautiful bright yellow flower in the natural habitat. He is attracted by the flower's attributes, and he makes close reference to its beauty and number. He is equally inspired by the flower's appearance, bright colours and delicate scent. He is so aroused that he personalises the flower and in fact identifies with it even after he has long left the natural scene. The experience leaves a lasting memory in the poet's mind which he often recalls especially during certain periods when he is unhappy.

Themes

The major themes of this poem include the power of nature, the experience of loneliness and the simplicity of life.

The Power of nature

The power of nature is emphasised in this poem. In "Daffodils", the poet is no doubt attracted to the beauty of the flower. But at another level of interpretation, the flower represents nature as a supernatural force. The significance of the daffodils is not restricted to its beauty alone, but its effect on the person who beholds the beauty of the flower. When he comes across the flower, the poet is clearly relieved from his emotional distress. The memory of that singular event lingers on through his life.

Loneliness

The very first line of the poem introduces us to the psychological instability of the poet. The first line reads, "I wandered lonely as a cloud". There is a comparison of the lonely state of the poet to a moving cloud, drifting aimlessly across the sky. Here, the depressed state of the poet reveals that life sometimes is not a bed of roses. There are times when the human state reaches rock bottom due to varying circumstances such as unfulfilled dreams, loss of a dear one, among other challenges. According to the poem, nature is a healer; it provides cure to life's enormous challenges and worries.

The Simplicity of life

One of the characteristics of nature is its simplicity. The daffodil flower is a common plant. However, through the simplicity of language, the poet is able to reveal something unique about the flower. In other words, a common flower like the daffodil can possess exclusive traits. The simplicity of the flower is a metaphor for the promotion of a simple life style. In general, the flower is a symbol of beauty, peace and simplicity.

Language and Style

The poem is made up of twenty-four lines. Each stanza is a sestet, made up of six lines, and there are four stanzas in the poem. The poem is a lyric with end rhymes and rhythmic lines. The rhyme scheme of the first four lines of each stanza is made up of an alternate rhyme of *abab*, while the last two lines are rhyming couplets.

The language is musical and it is easily accessible. The poem is also unique for its narrative appeal, as the verbs reveal the use of past tense, e.g. wandered, saw, stretched, gazed. However, the last stanza reflects the use of present tense, which refers to the lasting effect

the experience of the flower has on the poet.

Poetic Devices

Simile – The theme of loneliness is depicted in the very first line of the poem with the use of simile. In the expression, “I wandered lonely as a cloud”, the poet compares himself to a cloud set adrift (perhaps by the wind), completely unaware of its destination.

Inversion – Part of the aesthetic effects in the poem is the use of inversion in some expressions. It is used in line 18, “What wealth the show to me had brought” and line 23 “And then my heart with pleasures fills”.

Hyperbole – This is the use of excessive exaggeration in a poem in order to create a serious and lasting effect. The use is evident in line 11. “Ten thousand saw I at a glance.” It should be noted that the same sentence could as well pass for an inversion.

Personification – This is a significant poetic device which endows the daffodils with humane attributes. The last lines of stanzas one and two are good examples.

“Fluttering and dancing in the breeze” – line 6
“Tossing their heads in sprightly dance” – line 12.

Alliteration – This is used in lines 7 and 24:

“Continuous as the stars that shine”
“Dancing with the daffodils”

Enjambment – This poetic device is common, as expressions flow into the next lines in the poem. For example,

“I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o’er vales and hills”

SIR WALTER RALEIGH’S “THE SOUL’S ERRAND”

Background of the Poet

Born in 1552 at Devonshire in England, Sir Walter Raleigh was educated at Oxford and was about six years of age when Queen Elizabeth took over the throne. He was a great man during his time. An explorer, historian and soldier, he founded the colony of Virginia and was subsequently made a knight. He fought gallantly for the Queen’s campaign against Spain.

However, he later fell out of favour because he married the Queen’s maid without her consent. After the reign of Queen Elizabeth, her successor, James I, ordered his execution as he was charged with treason. He had written quite a number of poems. But on the night before his execution, he wrote “The Soul’s Errand”.

Subject Matter

The poem is an address to the soul which is on a quest. It is believed that while the human body can be overtaken by death and decay, the soul however lives on. The soul is therefore described as the body’s guest that would one day roam freely.

The first stanza of the poem is a delegation of duty, without any form of compensation. The soul is saddled with the responsibility of speaking the truth to everyone irrespective of rank, profile or status.

The poet portrays the soul as the container of the conscience. It is instructed to challenge the views and opinion of every individual whether in high places or otherwise. The first port of call is the “Court”, which is expected to be a place of justice and equity. However, the reverse is the case. Other stanzas speak on various men of importance who only pretend to be what they are not. Their outward appearance is a contrast to their true behaviour.

In the last stanza, the poet encourages the soul not to be afraid in carrying out its duties because no one can eliminate the soul. The poem is indeed a metaphor for the significance of the human conscience.

Themes

Among the major themes of this poem are the issues of deception, truth, conscience, courage and resilience, as well as the immortality of the soul.

Deception

The poem is a lampoon of double standards in human society whereby men are judged only by their outward appearance, economic and political status, rather than by the content of their character. The poet persona is very careful of the deceptive nature of man and

therefore he tries to expose this deception.

Truth

The central message in this poem is the demand for truth. Right from the first stanza, the emphasis is on the need for the truth to be told at any cost. At a metaphorical level of interpretation, the poem is an exposé on the nature of man as a deceiving, wicked being. The world is falling apart, and one of the reasons for the fall is that many people are not being truthful to themselves and to others.

Need for good conscience

There is a subtle message about the importance of a clear conscience. The conscience is a vital part of every human being. Although it is not physically represented, it serves as the referee and reviewer of every action taken, or yet to be taken, by man. It equally serves as an important guide in man's journey through life. A man without conscience is considered to be dead to feelings and is said to be extremely dangerous. The poem however unfolds the importance of conscience as a primary tool towards living a productive life.

Courage and resilience

The soul is charged with the responsibility to speak the truth without fear. This can be seen in line 3 of the poem. At the metaphorical level of interpretation, courage is a virtue every individual must have in order to overcome certain challenges in life. In the course of performing some duties, there are usually obstacles which could prevent one from achieving one's objective. It often takes courage and resilience to break through barriers.

Immortality of the soul

The immortality of the soul brings to mind the fact that death is only an end for the human body. The soul, according to many religious beliefs, lives on and would be responsible for the actions and inactions of man in the afterlife. At a metaphorical level of interpretation, man should, in fact, take more care of his soul than his body because this would determine the choice of either everlasting peace or eternal torture.

Language and Style

The poem, containing thirteen stanzas, is simple and the language is accessible. It is generally made of six line stanzas. There is the use of alternate end rhymes in the first four lines and rhyming couplets in the last two lines of all the stanzas. The use of monologue with a dramatic and persuasive touch strikes the imagery of a conversation between two people. The poem is allegorical, as themes of virtues and beliefs serve as characters, projecting the thoughts of the speaker on the immortality of the soul.

Poetic Devices

Personification – This is the main poetic device in the poem. The soul is given a human attribute, a messenger on a mission. Also, common virtues are also given human attributes. They include wisdom, favour, zeal, love, fortune, charity and so on.

Simile – This is used in line 8:

“And shines like rotten wood”

Irony – This is a common factor throughout the poem. At the beginning of the poem, the poet persona charges the soul with the message of truth. However, in the last lines of the second stanza to the last stanza, he ironically commands the soul to heed to deception, if his message of truth is not accepted.

Paradox – This is used in line 26:

“The begged for more by spending”

Metonymy – Here, references are made to influential leaders using words such “Court” and “Church”.

Repetition – Certain words are repeated in the poem. This is to lay emphasis on the point being made by the poetic persona. For example, words such as ‘their’, ‘tell’.

Refrain – The last lines of each stanza could as well pass for a refrain, e.g. “...give them all the lie”.

Background of the Poet

John Fletcher was born in 1579. He was educated at Cambridge University in England. He was known as a great creative writer. He was not just a poet, but also a playwright and dramatist. He flourished during the Elizabethan age and was reported to have co-authored the play *King Henry VIII* with William Shakespeare. However, he is best known for his collaboration with Francis Beaumont, another English poet and playwright. The themes in his poem are mainly based on religious values.

Subject Matter

This poem centres on the destiny of man, which translates to man's journey on earth. It is easy to summarise this poem simply as another philosophical (quest) search towards discovering the fate of man. Generally, it is an attempt to understand the world in which man exists. At the beginning of the poem, the poet challenges certain groups of people such as astrologers, mystics and diviners who pretend to know more about the world and end up misleading other people. He satirises their deceptive ways, which, according to him, only work on the kings and mighty men, but not the poor.

The second part of the poem dwells essentially on the supremacy of God and the need for man to rely solely on God and on the power of His protection. The poet seems to emphasise that for man to have peace in this world, he must be filled with the spirit of God and walk in the path of His knowledge. In the end, he states categorically that every man is in charge of his own destiny in this world, and the key to becoming a perfect man lies in his honesty.

Themes

The main themes of this poem include the supremacy of God, the limitation of man's knowledge, the importance of honesty, and death as a mere passage.

Supremacy of God

The poet concludes his monologue highlighting on God as the Supreme Being to whom all men will answer. God, according to the poem, is the giver of all life and maker of all destinies. And man is made only in his image and after his likeness. Therefore, this is an assertion on the limitations of the knowledge of man. In other words, man can only discover himself within this complex world only if he has the spirit of God dwelling in him and if only he submits to His will.

Man's knowledge is limited

The first part of the poem is a satire on the limitations of the knowledge of man about the world in which he exists. That every attempt at describing the world is futile and some time based on falsehood. As much as there are people who specialise in certain endeavours, the lesson here is that of humility because man's knowledge, no matter how great, would always be limited in describing the world he exists.

Honesty is the best policy

The title of the poem is, in fact, suggestive. It is also conclusive, that man's journey in life should reflect a noteworthy, honest character. The poem is a satire on the so-called respectable men who actually use dubious means in acquiring their fortune and fame. This would not last, and such men risk losing their souls to hell. Therefore, honest living should be every man's objective in life.

Death is transient (Death as a passage)

According to several creative writers, death is usually described as the end of man. After death, man's journey is complete. However, the poem, in line 90, preaches that death is merely a transition into another life. Therefore, death should not be feared. However, what would make the new world perfect would only depend on the honest dealings of man during his sojourn on earth.

Language and Style

The poem has a religious undertone, which draws attention to the use of symbolic representations. Therefore, words such as truth, light, star, providence, angels have secondary layers of meaning. The tone is harsh and unforgiving in buttressing the arguments of the poet. Despite the fact that the poem is considerably long, the message is captivating through the use of impressive choice of words. This is noted in the use of rhetorical questions, provoking the thoughts of the reader. The stanzas in the poem are not uniform but the language is lyrical. The 92-line poem is written in rhyming couplets.

Poetic Devices

Metaphor – This is common in the poem. In line 5 “You that are God’s surveyors” and line 91 “Man is his own star”.

Simile – “Your calculations are as blind as ye”

Biblical allusion – This is used in line 26 and 27:

“He that made Egypt blind...”

Rhetorical questions – This is used to buttressing the argument of the poets. This is quite common in the poem.

Yes, and by truth, what shall become of me?”

Then say your worst! Or have I none at all?

Or is it burnt out lately? Or did fall?

Or am I poor? not able, no full flame?

Alliteration – Repetition of consonant sounds: “Commands all light, all influence, all fate”

Assonance – Repetition of vowel sounds: “Our acts our angels are, or good or ill”

Enjambment – “All influence, all fate! And when my mind

Is furnished with his fullness, my poor story”

JOHN DONNE’S “THE SUN RISING”

Background of the Poet

John Donne was born into a Roman Catholic family. He grew up to become a cleric in the Church of England. He is regarded as one of the leading metaphysical poets of the 17th century. Metaphysical poets are noted for their sensual style and their use of complex symbols. They are also known for their use of elevated language and religious themes.

Donne’s poetry uses what is known as [metaphysical conceit](#), that is, an extended metaphor that combines two different ideas into a single idea.

His works express deep emotion and often relate to themes of love, death and religion through the use of wit and intellect. A typical example of his poetry is the poem, “The Sun Rising”.

Subject Matter

The poem is an address to the sun by a disgruntled poet persona. Ordinarily, the sun is a welcome phenomenon because it symbolises light and life. In fact, many works have focused on the dynamic nature of the sun. However, the poem “The Sun Rising” is a reverse idea or ironic composition. Rather, the sun is portrayed as a mere agent of distraction, with no good intent on the life of the person. The first line expressively describes the sun as “busy, old fool” and “unruly sun”. Again, the poet persona regards the sun as unwanted and wicked intruder, preying on lovers. However, at the end, the poet recognises the immortality and confesses the dynamic nature of the sun.

Themes

Below are some of the basic themes which can be found in the poem:

The power of the sun

Here, the poet establishes the dominating power of the sun over mankind. The actions of the sun are not determined by anybody. In actually fact, according to the poet, the sun comes and goes as it pleases, penetrating anywhere without seeking permission. The poet in the end acknowledges the power of the sun, saying “thy beams, so reverend and strong.” In the end, it also pays homage to the duty of the sun.

The sun is immortal

The poem also reveals the immortality of the sun, describing the sun as omniscient. The poet makes reference to the sun’s age, bearing in mind that no one alive knows how and when it was created. With that vision, it is impossible to ignore the sun as a pre-existing phenomenon.

Love

Although this theme is not expressively dealt with, there is a subtle undertone of love. In fact, the poet persona's anger against the sun is because the disturbance of its rays when he is with his lover in bed. The first stanza therefore admonishes the sun to go somewhere else to torment "late school boys, and sour apprentices". Love is essentially the catalyst which spurred the poetic persona in challenging one of nature's greatest phenomena known as the sun.

Importance of nature

Once more, nature is celebrated. The sun is an element of nature through which man exists. In the last stanza of the poem, the characteristics and functions of the sun are elaborated on by the poet. The sun provides light, warmth and, in fact, the centre of all living things. This showcases the importance of nature to the existence of man.

Language and Style

The poem takes the form of a monologue, an address to the sun as if it is animate, questioning its influence and its grandeur. The poem is made up of three stanzas, with the first containing nine lines while the remaining two, ten lines each. The last two lines of each stanza end with a rhyming couplets, while the use of alternate rhymes is common throughout the poem. The language is embellished with provoking imagery, while bringing to fore a philosophical re-representation of the sun.

Poetic Devices

Personification – The sun is personified with human attributes. This is evident in the first line of the poem. "Busy old fool, unruly sun."

Assonance – There is also the repetition of vowel sounds in the same expression.

Rhetorical questions – These provoke the imaginative capability of the reader. E.g.

"Through windows, and through curtains call on us" – line 3

"Why should thou think" – line 11

Metaphor – There is a direct comparison of the sun, called a "saucy pedantic wretch".

WILFRED OWEN'S "STRANGE MEETING"

Background of the Poet

Wilfred Owen was born on March 18, 1893 at Oswestry. He was educated at the University of London. He began to write poetry in 1910 at the age of 17. He was enlisted in the Artist's Rifles but in 1911, he was sent to Graiglockhard War Hospital. He returned to his regiment in 1918 but was killed by machine gun during the World War I on November 4 1918, just a week before the Armistice.

Subject Matter

"Strange Meeting" is the opinion of the poet on the effects of the First World War on the world. It is only ironical that he was killed just a week before the ceasefire, the decree to end the war. This poem is in fact a conversation between the poet persona and a complete stranger who seemed to know the poet persona. The dialogue revolves round the poet finding himself in a strange place, filled with sleeping people, after 'escaping from a battle'. But one of them strikes a conversation with him. Sooner, he discovers that he is in the land of the dead and the fellow, who refers to the poet as friend, was also a victim. He was in fact killed during the war by the poet persona.

Themes

The major themes of this poem revolve around the destructive nature of war, the inhumanity of man in war situation, and other problems related to war.

The destructive nature of war

The central theme of this poem is the destructive nature of war. Millions of lives were lost during the World War I. The poet brings to the fore the hazardous consequences of the war, which often result into loss of life and wanton destruction of property. The message here is that war brings nothing but grief and sadness to mankind.

Disillusionment and disenfranchisement

Another important theme is the effect of disillusionment and disenfranchisement on victims of war. As a result of the horror experienced in warfronts, many soldiers and other victims never recover from the psychological trauma as a result of the loss of colleagues, friends or close relative. In this poem, one can only imagine the poet persona's shock from the revelation that he is having a friendly

conversation with someone he killed. If they had met on a different platform, they could perhaps have become great friends. This showcases the futility of war.

Man's inhumanity to man

War brings about violence. However, the poem further expresses the notion that war is the catalyst which makes man no better than a wild beast. The reader in the end questions the motive of the poet in killing his new friend. At a metaphorical level of interpretation, man, in the poem, is portrayed as man's greatest enemy.

Human life is important

Within the atmosphere of violence, torture and death, there lies a provoking thought that human life is indeed sacred. The termination of a life has irreversible consequences, not only on the victim, his relatives/companions, but also the world in general. The killing of a man is simply interpreted as the killing of a dream or vision. Therefore, the reader is made to realise that life is sacred, and war/violence should be avoided at all cost.

Language and Style

With the use of past tense verbs, "Strange meeting" is a narrative poem, which tells a story of the surrealistic experience of the war victim in the land of the dead. The narrative form is buttressed by a conversation with another character in the poem. This is therefore an imaginative poem. The diction of the poem provokes imagery of agony, pains, torture and death, which are the effects of war. The language, however, is simple and easily accessible, with a dramatic touch.

Poetic Devices

Allusion – There is the use of biblical allusion to Hell, a place of torture and pain. "By his dead smile I knew we stood in Hell"

Oxymoron – Here, contrasting words are placed side by side. Examples include "dead smile" and "strange friends."

Paradox – "I am the enemy you killed, my friend."

Hyperbole – "With a thousand pains"

Metaphor – "They will be swift with swiftness of the tigress."

Imagery – There is symbolic representation of words such as battle, war, sprang, wild, guns, and blood.

Onomatopoeia – guns *thumped*

Assonance – When much blood had clogged their chariot-wheels.

S. T. COLERIDGE'S KUBLA KHAN

Background of the Poet

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was born on October 21, 1772 in a town called Ottery St Mary, Devon in England. He was a literary critic, philosopher and an English poet. He was a friend of William Wordsworth and a co-founder of the Romantic Movement of the 19th century. In 1798, Wordsworth and Coleridge both published a collection of poems entitled *Lyrical Ballads, with a Few Other Poems*, and this was considered to have marked the beginning of the English Romantic movement. He also wrote critical works on William Shakespeare, and he is best known for his famous ballad, *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, and *Kubla Khan*. He died on July 25, 1834 at the age of 61.

Subject Matter

The poem was said to be completed in 1798 but published in 1816. According to Coleridge, in the preface, he got the inspiration to compose the poem one night when he was doused by opium and in a dreamy state. Many critics denounced the poem and questioned the story about its origin. However, the poem gradually gains its fame.

The poem begins with the description of a beautiful place called Xanadu, a land that the poet persona is believed to admire and appreciate. But from lines 12 -18, the tone of the author changes to reveal a dark chasm in which a fountain exists, and this forms the River Alph that extends into the sea. The poem appraises the power of imagination and life. It is a poem that also narrates the beauty of creation.

Themes

Beauty of creation

In this poem, Coleridge artistically recreates the story of creation through the use of references made to the Garden of Eden. The first part of the poem gives a vivid description of the beauty of nature and its embellished glory. It showcases the fact that all life begins with creation of the world.

Nature versus nurture

There is the contrast of the natural and the artificial in the poem. In the first stanza of the poem, there is the appreciation of the city Xanadu which is man-made. However, the poet also lays emphasis on the nature and “sacred” river that runs past the city into the sea. The wall of the city is a contrast to exotic features of the natural caves through which the river runs.

Life and death

The metaphor of the fountain illustrates the theme of life and death. The fountain is a symbol of life. This is seen as the poet persona explores the dark chasm in the midst of Xanadu's gardens, describing it as both “savage” and “holy”. At a metaphorical level of interpretation, in life, there are always two sides to a coin. Every living thing is susceptible to the powers of death.

Power of imagination

There is a serious appeal to the power of the imagination in the poem. The reader is made to experience the power of the poet's vision. In fact, there is a strong indication that the creation of the world is propelled by the power of the imagination. In addition, there is the celebration of the poet as a visionary and a ‘creator’.

Language and Style

The poem is highly stylised and it is different from other poems written by Coleridge. The poem could be said to be a work of art captured from a dreamy experience. It is a romantic poem which promotes the celebration of nature and expressively describes the poet as a ‘creator’. The diction is simple and has a descriptive format with the use of adjectives that provoke the imagination of the reader.

Poetic Devices

Inversion – This is used particularly in the first two lines of the poem:

“In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree.”

Alliteration – “With walls and towers were girdled round.”

Simile – “A savage place! as holy and enchanted
As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted”

Allusion – “It was an Abyssinian maid,
And on her dulcimer she played”

Repetition – “And all who heard should see them there,
And all should cry, Beware! Beware!”

Synecdoche – “But oh! that deep romantic chasm which slanted
Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover!”

Questions

1. Using four themes, give a detailed analysis of the poem “Soul's Errand”.
2. Discuss the tone and mood of the poetic persona in “Upon an Honest Man's Fortune”.
3. The narrative of the poem “Strange Meeting” is an extended metaphor for a page in history. With various themes of your choice, discuss this assertion.
4. With copious examples from the poem, discuss the style and structure of the poem “Daffodils”.
5. Write on the significance of the poem “The Sun Rising”.