

# Wordsworth's View of Nature: Return to nature and Find Psychological Well-being

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**Abstract.** In modern society, people are suffering from more and more stress, which leads to various mental diseases. However, William Wordsworth, as a famous British romantic poet in the 19th century, had his own methods to release pressure and maintain mental health. His nature poetry is fresh and moving, delicate and beautiful, describing all kinds of beautiful natural scenery. By eulogizing the beauty of nature, we can feel the inspiration of nature to human beings, and express the poet's symbiosis with nature and his love for nature. This paper will mainly analyze the view of nature in Wordsworth's famous work "I Wandered Lonely As a Cloud", and explore the practical methods to find psychological well-being for modern people.

**Keywords:** Wordsworth, nature, stress, psychological well-being.

## 1. Introduction

With the development of urbanization and socialization, the modern life style makes more and more people feel stressed and even causes a lot of mental illness. Over the past century, more than half of the modern era's global population has migrated to urbanised areas, and rapid advances in technology have meant that most people's exposure to the elements has been dramatically reduced (Colding et al., 2020). The prevalence of mood disorders was 39 percent higher in urban areas than in rural areas (Peen et al., 2010) and the economic cost of anxiety and mood disorders is estimated at €187.4 billion a year in Europe alone (Gustavsson et al. 2012, Olesen et al. 2012). However, time spent in natural environments has been linked to better psychological well-being (R. Kaplan, 1973).

Wordsworth was a famous British romantic writer in the 19th century. He believed that nature could cultivate people's sentiments and make people have good feelings. "Because in that condition of life our elementary feelings coexist in a state of greater simplicity, and, consequently, may be more accurately contemplated, and more forcibly communicated"(Wordsworth, 2003). Only when people put themselves into nature can they have their own real happiness. It is interesting to explore the influence of nature features in Wordsworth's poetry on later generations: In literary creation, he broke through the shackles of neoclassicism in the 18th century and effectively promoted the innovation of English poetry and the development of the romantic movement. With his smooth, clean and simple style of writing and bold innovation, he created a new era of English poetry. In addition, through his own creation, he reflected the reflection on the nature and the society. "The authors expressed their emotion in their writings Rousseau said 'romanticism is the return to nature' because nature always closes within human beings"(Hasan and Muhamad, 2020).

The majority of research exploring the influence of Wordsworth's works on literature, view of nature and environmental protection. For example, Kaur, Zameerpal (2017) believe

Wordsworth and other Romantic poets respected the green Earth, especially after the Industrial Revolution in the 18th century, when harmony was broken and they tried to connect man with nature again. Wordsworth depicted the natural world in his poetry as seen in most of his work, adopting nature and seeing it as a "source of inspiration", and his life experiences helped him to see nature or the natural world as the main force in his work to warn mankind of all the environmental problems occurring in his time, especially after the Industrial Revolution(Hasan and Muhamad, 2020). Wordsworth was a master of describing natural things. Peace, beauty, sweetness and pleasure are the most common words in his poems.(Xiaolin Huang et al., 2014). From the perspective of literature, Wordsworth advocated plain language and opposed flowery rhetoric; From the perspective of ecology,

Wordsworth's inner piety to nature, through the poetry of the integration of human and ecological thoughts incisively and vividly. However, less extensive researches focus on the impact on people's psychological well-being. "Humankind can only become whole through connection with the wild flower by the wayside as well as the tended corn. This is the essence of romanticism; it suggests that we might do well to pause a little longer at the place where our acquaintance with Wordsworth usually begins, with the daffodils"(Bate, 2012). Thus, this paper analyzes Wordsworth's masterpiece "I Wandered Lonely As a Cloud" to explore its enlightening effect on nowadays people's psychological well-being.

## 2. How did Wordsworth's early experiences shape his conception of nature

**Childhood:** William Wordsworth was born in Cockermouth. The area where he lived, was in the Lake District in the northwest corner of England. The natural beauty of the place healed and compensated for his lack of material and family connections. The lake area was a crucial influence on Wordsworth's naturalistic poetry. Long exposure to nature gave him a preliminary understanding of it. "Just as De Quinley said, 'Wordsworth had his passion for nature fixed in blood. It was a necessity. And through his commerce with nature did he live and breathe'. The colors, scents, sounds, the blue of the sky, the sparkle of the sunlight on water, the sound and plumage of birds in nature deeply influenced Wordsworth's growth of genius"(Huang, 2014).

**Student period:** Wordsworth entered St. John's College in 1787, Cambridge. At that time, Wordsworth did not seem to be used to the boring study in university. He considers man and nature are mutually adapted in essence, and the human mind is the mirror of the most fair and interesting properties of nature (Wordsworth, 2003). At the same time, the dirty social atmosphere made him uneasy. This uneasiness strengthened Wordsworth's faith in nature.

**The Revolutionary period:** Wordsworth arrived in France in 1798, when the French Revolution reached its critical stage. He was full of enthusiasm and high hopes for the revolution. However, the final outcome of the French Revolution left Wordsworth deeply traumatized. Therefore, after the end of the French Revolution, he returned to nature, trying to heal in the nature itself, hoping to find comfort and peace with nature itself.

## 3. William Wordsworth's view about Nature in "I Wandered Lonely As a Cloud"

This poem was written shortly after Wordsworth returned from France. The poet was devastated and deeply disappointed, and with the help of his friends and sister, he struggled to recover. The poet wrote the poem shortly after feeling calm:

*I wandered lonely as a cloud  
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,  
When all at once I saw a crowd,  
A host of golden daffodils;*

At the beginning of the poem, the poet compares himself to a lonely cloud. Why compare the cloud to himself? First of all, cloud is a product of nature, but it is not fixed in place like flowers and trees. Clouds are drifting, which also means the poet's free will. He is not bound to the dull courses in the university, nor does he fall into the vortex of the secular, but alone in pursuit of nature, drifting like a cloud. Speaking of "drifting clouds", it is hard not to think of Nietzsche's famous saying, "He who will eventually light the lightning will always drift like a cloud". Wordsworth was no different. Instead of leading a high-profile life as a poet laureate, Wordsworth retreated to the Lake District with his sister, enjoying the natural landscape. People face the material world and get spiritual feelings. Are the stone and wood buildings of big cities better suited to human habitation or the valleys and lakes of the lake District? Wordsworth chose the latter. In Wordsworth's time, with the deepening of the industrial Revolution and the continuous expansion of urban population, the spread of public

hazards, social chaos and environmental pollution were terrifying. In particular, the so-called civilized laws and scientific and technological rationality of industrial society greatly suppressed humanity and made people feel spirit-suffocating. Where does the human spirit dwell? Wordsworth's search led him to unspoiled natural landscapes, and he chose to live and die in the Lake District. What's more, Wordsworth also showed the world by his choice: the pure nature of the lake District can heal the emotional injury and comfort the soul pain, and it is an ideal spiritual home for human beings.

*Continuous as the stars that shine  
And twinkle on the Milky Way*

Wordsworth compared the mass of daffodils to the brilliant stars, and placed the stars in the great natural background of the Milky Way. First, in the real life, the poet comes across a field of daffodils in the park. In the literary and artistic level, it becomes the appreciation of the stars in the vast universe; Finally, to the spiritual level, it is to seek the true meaning of life in the vast expanse of nature.

*not but be gay,  
In such a jocund company:  
I gazed -and gazed -but little thought  
What wealth the show to me had brought:  
For oft, when on my couch I lie  
In vacant or in pensive mood,  
They flash upon that inward eye  
Which is the bliss of solitude;  
And then my heart with pleasure fills,  
And dances with the daffodils*

Wordsworth felt exhilarated and inspired by his chance encounter with the beautiful daffodils, and regretted that he could not stay long enough to admire them. On the surface, this regret is because of leaving the daffodils, but also Wordsworth's regret for the French revolution and social atmosphere. Wordsworth, however, often had a picture of a daffodil in his mind, and his spirits were lifted by it. By this time Wordsworth had integrated himself with nature, he lived in nature, and nature lived in his heart. "And it is certain that nature is beautiful and holy, and it could offer pleasure, tranquility and purification of mind. Consequently, the poet finds the way of pursuing the spiritual self-salvation through the nature" (Liu, 2021).

#### **4. The guiding significance of Wordsworth's natural wisdom to modern people**

Since the Industrial Revolution, human society has entered a stage of rapid development. Machines instead of hands, vehicles instead of horses. As the world becomes more and more diverse, people's pressures have changed from the original single problem of food and clothing to various ones. For example, for students, Financial problems, expectations of good grades from teachers and family members, competition among students, and worries about the future all add to student stress (Bresolin JZ et al., 2022). Academic pressure hangs over their heads like a sword of Damocles all the time. "Rates of depression can be particularly high amongst young people aged 16–24, the age at which many young people start university." (Martin and Atkinson, 2020). A considerable number of students become anxious because they pay too much attention to their academic performance, as if academic performance will decide everything in their future life. But for Wordsworth, who did not do well at university, he eventually became poet laureate. His view of nature tells students to explore their own interests, rather than being confined to school.

In modern society, work stress is very common and can cause mental illness. The concept of stress became a ubiquitous explanation for people's reactions to specific social changes, such as the stress of changing work environments, financial worries, and the fear of unemployment (Jill Kirby, 2022). Both unemployment and persistent "unemployment" can have a detrimental effect on people's health, leading to an increase in mental and physical problems. Unemployment increases anxiety, depression, suicide, high blood pressure, diabetes, stroke and heart disease (Litchfield and Cooper, 2016). People

seem to be lost in the forest of tall buildings and the rumbling engine sound. Nature walking is considered a cost-effective and inclusive way to successfully use nature for health and well-being. Symptoms of depression and anxiety have been shown to benefit from nature walking (Grassini, 2022). So people should do more outdoor sports and get more involved in nature. It is estimated that 5-27% of depression could be prevented if city dwellers spent an extra 10 to 30 minutes per week visiting green Spaces (Cox et al., 2017; Shanahan et al., 2019). Frequent access to nature during work and leisure time may be associated with higher energy and dedication, thus reducing cynicism and professional inadequacy (Hyvönen K et al., 2018). Nature experiences can improve people's mental health. Vegetation cover and afternoon bird abundance were positively correlated with lower prevalence of depression, anxiety, and stress in the population. (Daniel T. C. Cox et al., 2017). Industrialisation and urbanisation have swallowed up vast swathes of nature. Increasing vegetation coverage in urban communities is also a good way to bring people closer to nature. Among the survey population, 38 per cent, 76 per cent and 38 per cent of respondents were deemed to be at risk of exhibiting symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress because nearby vegetation cover levels were not met. (Daniel T. C. Cox et al., 2017).

## 5. Conclusion

It is necessary to seek relief from stress and maintain mental health in nature. Wordsworth encountered with across a daffodil and held joyful in his heart. He resisted his pressure with the beauty of nature. For modern people, "seclusion" is not a good strategy, but people can choose to have more contact with nature, choose a more natural and healthy lifestyle, and face the pressure in life with a natural attitude. People's life styles and attitudes should be closely combined with nature so that they could gain the psychological well-being.

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