

A comparative Analysis of Robert Herrick's To Daffodils and William Wordsworth's the Daffodils

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to compare and contrast the two poems with similar names_ "Daffodils" which is a simple word that reminds about the arrival of the spring season. A bunch of daffodils symbolize the joys and happiness of life. Both the poems are about the comparison between man and nature. The poems are very different in the terms of the way daffodils influence the writer's state of mind. The poems have contrasting content and theme. Wordsworth's poem tells a story about a lonely man walking, when he saw a field full of daffodils and he became happy and overjoyed. Robert Herrick laments at the situation as the daffodils bloom and very soon depart from the mortal world. There are various different stylistic features in the two poems. Both poems are rich in the use of simile, personification, hyperbole and enjambment. The use of figures of speech strengthens the visual image of the poems. However, both the poets have dealt with the same element i.e. daffodils, they differ from each other in their presentation and treatment of the theme. From the beginning to the end of the poem, Wordsworth differs from Herrick in many ways such as in the numbers of line, selection of words, figure of speech, metre, rhyme scheme, mood, phonological, lexical, syntactic, semantic style. In the present paper, the researcher compares these two poems on the basis of above mentioned parameters.

Key words: daffodils, nature, death, simile, hyperbole, personification, theme, rhyme scheme.

Introduction

Robert Herrick is considered as a Cavalier poet who deals chiefly with love and war. His poems express depressed mood. His poems show strong influence of Ben Jonson and the classics. Robert Herrick did not earn much acclaim in his time but later his only collection of poems has been taken into consideration by the critics and scholars. His poetry is remarkable for keen enjoyment of nature and a fresh outlook upon life. His lyrical power is characterized by freshness, passion and felicity of expression. *To Daffodils* was first published in 1648. He makes an analogy between the life of *the daffodils* and the short life span of humans. In this poem, the poet laments on the short life of the human and says that the life is so short that it ends without being noticed. In *To Daffodils*, he might have expressed his depressed mood with the allusion of daffodils. It seems that through the reference of daffodils he may express his sadness of civil war and expresses his grief for those whom he had lost in the war. He says that life is too short to live like daffodils as they grow very fast and perish also fast without the noticed by many.

William Wordsworth, one of the greatest poets of nature, popularly known as the pioneer of Romantic Revival describes nature as a true representative of Almighty God. His poems are full of joy and power. He worships nature as a friend, philosopher and guide. He believes that he is a true child of nature. He not only adores nature but also paves the way for the younger generation of the poets like Lord Byron, P B Shelley and John Keats. He sits in the lap of the nature and sings the songs of her. *The Daffodils* is Wordsworth's most famous work in which he expresses his feelings about the daffodils and praises the beauty of the flowers and also gives advice to the human being to enjoy the sight of beautiful nature. Wordsworth does not compare the human life with *the daffodils while* he compares himself with the lonely wandering cloud. He freely praises the beauty of the nature. By comparing the two poems_ *To Daffodils* and *The Daffodils*, it seems that Wordsworth does not want to preach the human being like Robert Herrick. Wordsworth believes in the principle of Art for Art Sake whereas Herrick believes in the principle of Art for Life Sake.

Theme

To Daffodils is a poem divided into two stanzas. In the very first stanza, Robert Herrick talks about the flower daffodils. He grieves that the human does not enjoy the beauty of the flowers as they grow very fast. The duration of their gloom is so short that it seems even the rising sun still has not reached the noon-time. Thus, in the very beginning he has struck a note of mourning at the fast dying of daffodils. The poet then addresses the daffodils and asks them to stay until the clay ends with the evening prayer. After praying together, he says that they will also accompany the daffodils. This is so because like flowers, men too have a very transient life and even the youth is also very short-lived. As he sings:

We have short time to stay, as you,
We have as short a spring;
As quick a growth to meet decay,
As you, or anything.
We die
As your hours do, and dry away,
Like to the summer's rain;
Or as the pearls of morning's dew,
Ne'er to be found again.

Robert Herrick symbolically refers to the youth as spring in these lines. He compares human life with the life of daffodils. Further, he says that both of them grow very fast to be destroyed later. Just like the short duration of the flowers, men too die away soon. Their life is as short as the rain of the summer season, which comes for a very short time; and the dewdrops in the morning, which vanish away and never return. Thus, the poet after comparing the flowers to human beings later turns to the objects of nature_ he compares the life of daffodils with summer, rain, dewdrops and the like.

Thus, Robert Herrick in the first stanza of the poem talks about *the daffodils* flowers and in the immediate stanza he compares human life with *the daffodil*'flowers employing through various natural elements like rain, dew drops, summer etc.

The Daffodils is an immortal poem divided into four stanzas. The theme of this poem is based on the healing and refreshing power of nature. The poem is rich in imagery and the description of the daffodils is delightful. Wordsworth opens the poem with simile and compares himself with the lonely wandering cloud. When he sees the beautiful golden daffodils growing beside a bay beneath the trees, he finds himself captivated by the magical beauty of the scene. The poet is alone and having nature in mind wandering from one place to another like a cloud which flies over vales and hills with the wind. All of a sudden, he sees a large number of golden daffodils which are growing on the bank of the lake under the trees. A light breeze is blowing, making the daffodils flutter and dance with it. For the poet, the view of these beautiful golden daffodils is similar to the stars shining and twinkling in the milky-way. As far as the poet can see, he finds only the daffodils growing along the margin of a bay and they seem to the poet to be in very large numbers. All of these flowers are tossing their heads in a sprightly dance. In the nearby lake, the waves are dancing with the wind and sparkling because of the sun-rays falling on them. But the beauty of the golden daffodils is so attractive and charming that it easily surpasses the beauty of the dancing and sparkling waves. In the second stanza, the poet compares daffodils with the stars. The poet is very much impressed by the beauty of the near-by lake whose waves are also dancing and sparkling. The poet begins to admire the mesmeric beauty of *the daffodils* and is unable to think of anything else.

The concluding stanza of the poem is the most important part of the poem which is considered as the essence of the poem. According to him, when one is in the state of solitude, one becomes retrospective and meditates on all the good and pleasurable moments which one had or which

had happened to him-in his life. The speaker reveals that he not only still has the memory of the daffodils, but that he has also kept the memory of how they made him feel. He greatly feels happy not only with himself but also with all that happened to him. This is how nature influences him. The poet feels happy and blessed in such an enchanting and cheerful company. The poet is completely absorbed in the beauty of the daffodils and for the moment he has lost touch with his surroundings. He considers himself fortunate and very happy that he has been the witness to such a wonderful sight and the jocund company of the daffodils. Later, whenever the poet is thinking of not being busy, lying on his couch the daffodils flash upon his imagination. The memory of the daffodils not only fills his heart with pleasure but also has a refreshing effect on him and he feels like dancing along with the daffodils. The poet says that whenever he lies on his couch having nothing to do or in pensive mood, enjoying the solitude, the images of the daffodils flash upon his inward eyes. When this happens, the poet feels calm, refreshed, motivated and good about himself. This is how nature influences him. The memories of the daffodils fill his heart with pleasure and joy and he feels like dancing along with the daffodils.

Nature

As Herrick moves gradually in the poem, he turns to the nature and employs natural elements like season, dewdrops, rain and so on. As in the nature, any season does not remain for the long time in the same way, human life is mortal and it ends all of sudden. Nobody knows what will happen to the next moment. The poet by employing the allusion of daffodils points out the various developing stages of the life i.e. birth, youth and death as any flower has its growth in these three stages. The poet begins by saying that we grieve to see the beautiful daffodils being wasted away very quickly. The duration of their gloom is so short that it seems even the rising sun still hasn't reached the noon-time. Though the poem appears to be simply about nature, Herrick is actually comparing the life of human beings to the life of daffodils and nothing that the human's life truly is as short as the daffodils' life. The poet says:

Fair daffodils, we weep to see you haste away so soon

As yet the early-rising sun has not attained his noon
Stay, stay, until the hasting day has run, but to the even-song
And having prayed together, we will go with you along...

Wordsworth is mainly a nature poet and for him there is nothing superior to nature. He breathes through nature and finds solace and spiritual peace in it. He believes that nature is a means of salvation and spirituality. He firmly believes that nature has all the solution of the human's problems. Unlike Robert Herrick, Wordsworth is very positive and energetic in the presentation of the daffodils. The poem Daffodils describes the beauty and charm of the nature. Wordsworth points out the beauty of the nature through Daffodils. Wordsworth explains this through his style by the variations in rhythm, by the stressed pattern he followed, and by playing through words, he beautifully describes the contrast in the real natural world and the materialistic world of man. Being the prominent lover of nature he represented the various aspects of beauty and truth embodied in nature. As a matter of fact, Wordsworth is the most loving, penetrative and thoughtful poet of nature. His vision of nature is comprehensive and embracing. He is content to describe the bird and the flower, the wind and the tree, the river and the mountain. He describes very beautifully:

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milkyway,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of the bay:

Rhyme Scheme

Herrick composed his poem into two stanzas having total twenty lines and ten lines in each stanza. The poet has employed alternative stressed, unstressed syllabus and irregular lines in the poem. Such kind of composition creates the rhythm of the poem or in other words, the meters of the poem. The poem has end rhymes and the poet cuts and separates the fifth lines of both stanzas into two lines to achieve the form of rhyme and rhythm. The rhyme scheme of the poem is “abcbbdceae”.

Wordsworth’s poem contains four stanzas of six lines each. In each stanza, the first line rhymes with the third and the second with the fourth. The stanza then ends with a rhyming couplet. Wordsworth unifies the content of the poem by focusing the first three stanzas on the experience at the lake and the last stanza on the memory of that experience. Thus, throughout the poem, we find “abab cc” rhyme scheme.

Alliteration:

The poet has also put the element of alliteration in the poem. It is the use of same letters or sounds at the beginning of words that are close together.

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o’er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze

In the above stanza we find alliteration in lonely as a cloud, “high o’er vales and hills”; “when all at once”, (“w” and “o” have the same consonant sound in this phrase), “beside the lake, beneath the trees” in respective lines. Wordsworth unifies the content of the poem by focusing the first three stanzas on the experience at the lake and the last stanza on the memory of that experience.

Personification

Robert Herrick personifies *the daffodils* and his use of the word “decay”, “die”, and “dry” evoke a note of melancholy in his poem which arises out of the realization that beauty of *the daffodils* as well as all beauties are not going to stay forever.

Wordsworth personifies *the daffodils* in the poem. The poet uses individual words and phrases in different patterns in different linguistic context. In the first stanza, the poet has used contrast between “lonely” and “crowd” & “o’er” and “beneath”. Again the poet has used contrast words to stress and emphasize the meaning. This poem contains four stanzas and all are talking about poet’s imagination on nature. The poet uses maximum words related to nature. The poet describes nature by describing *the daffodils* and comparing them to stars and waves. He is also writing about himself in relation to nature. Nature is a source of happiness.

Language

Herrick has applied simple English so it can be clearly understood by even average readers. With his simple language, the poet has painted the cycle of daffodils in a beautiful way. The sentences are not very strange and complicated in the poem. Most of the sentences obey the grammar rules. As the poet personifies the daffodils, the poem develops a conversation between the poet and the daffodils. There is also an imperative sentence in the poem such as “Stay, stay” which makes the expression more forceful and convincing.

Like Herrick, Wordsworth has also used simple language in his poems. He is considered to be a poet of simple language. He believes that the language of the poem must be simple and pure so everyone can enjoy the essence of the poem. In *The Daffodils* he has used very simple English. He uses very simple words like lonely, cloud, vales, hills, crowd, golden daffodils, lake, beneath, breeze, stars, milky way, bay, tossing, glee, gay, couch, inward eye and the like. Clauses, phrases, words, nouns, verbs, in a sentence of any language need to be distinguished and put through in analysis to find out the foregrounding and the deviation. The poet likes to begin each stanza by using a complete sentence and he expands it by using elaborate predicates. The title of the poem itself is in a complete sentence.

Conclusion

Thus, Robert Herrick and William Wordsworth present the vivid images of nature. Both poems have peaceful imagery, such as daffodils. The two poems use diction to convey to the reader a clear mood but very different content, tone, stylistic features and didactic message. Both the poets differ from each other in the treatment of the daffodils. They are similar in the presentation of figures of speech such as simile, hyperbole, personification, alliteration and the like. The way of writing is very attractive and lucid. Both the poets have used very simple words, phrases and sentence so that even average readers can easily understand the intention of the poems. The application of symbols and images show poets' mastery over language. The choice of words by the writer or the poet plays a very important role in meaning making. It helps the reader to understand the message, the poet is trying to pass on. Herrick laments on the fast melting life through the allusion of daffodils whereas Wordsworth sings the beauty of daffodils and the sight of the thousands of daffodils gives pleasures to him until the life ends.

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