

William Wordsworth - "The Daffodils"

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.

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.

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:

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.

(1807)



Dorothy Wordsworth's Diary

When we were in the woods beyond Gowbarrow park we saw a few daffodils close to the water side, we fancied that the lake had floated the seed ashore & that the little colony had so sprung up – But as we went along there were more & yet more & at last under the boughs of the trees, we saw that there was a long belt of them along the shore, about the breadth of a country turnpike road. I never saw daffodils so beautiful they grew among the mossy stones about and about them, some rested their heads upon these stones as on a pillow for weariness & the rest tossed and reeled and danced & seemed as if they verily laughed with the wind that blew upon them over the Lake, they looked so gay ever dancing ever changing. This wind blew directly over the lake to them. There was here & there a little knot & a few stragglers a few yards higher up but they were so few as not to disturb the simplicity & unity & life of that one busy highway – We rested again & again. The Bays were stormy & we heard the waves at different distances & in the middle of the water like the Sea.^[9]— *The Grasmere Journal Thursday, 15 April 1802*

For the modern reader there is a special satisfaction in learning that the famous poem was based on an actual event in a landscape which is known to have regarded by the poet and his circle as an embodiment of the benign influence of nature on the human heart and mind. What Dorothy records and what William makes of it are very different, though the two records are independent of each other and in this difference much of the distinctive character of the subjective lyric which he invented by can be discerned—not least the idea of dwelling in retrospect on the moral influence of asuch a lovely natural scene.