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## **The Beautiful and the Sublime in Wordsworth's Poem *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud* (1807)**

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### **Abstract**

The approach is relevant to explore some specific perspectives on the poetry by giving close reading to the poem *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud* as well as looking at the poem historical backdrop. Each theoretical method enables us to notice aspects of the poem that we might otherwise overlook. The first interpretive lens, and the one that will be focused on this poem, is to examine the poem in relation to Immanuel Kant and Edmund Burke's aesthetic views. Wordsworth, a key figure in Romantic literature, expresses Romantic Aesthetics through a deep connection with Nature, emphasizing emotions, imagination, and individual experience. This article aims at investigating the beautiful and the sublime according to Kantian and Burkean concepts of Aesthetics. The initial findings reveal that Wordsworth celebrates the beautiful and the sublime in the poem. Wordsworth believes in the transformative power of Nature to evoke profound emotions and inspire a sense of awe, reflecting the romantic emphasis on the subjective and emotional aspects of human experience. This research is qualitative. Wordsworth's poem *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud* is the first source of data collection. Books and research articles are secondary sources of data collection. Research approach is inductive. This poem can further be analysed from the perspectives of other philosophers of Romantic Aesthetics.

Keywords: Kantian Theory, Burkean Theory, Romantic Aesthetics, Daffodils

### **Introduction**

Aesthetics is the philosophical study of beauty. Aesthetics is sometimes referred to as "romantic" due to its association with the Romanticism movement of the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

Romantic aesthetics, a movement prominent in the late 18th to mid-19th centuries, emphasized emotion, imagination, and nature in artistic expression (Smith, 2010). Romantic artists, such as William Wordsworth and Caspar David



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Friedrich, sought to evoke powerful feelings through their works, challenging the rationalism of the Enlightenment era (Jones, 2015). I have chosen two philosophers of Aesthetics for the current study:

### **Immanuel Kant( 1724-1804)**

### **Edmund Burke(1729-1797)**

### **Immanuel Kant**

### **Critique of Judgement( 1790)**

Immanuel Kant's reflections on the concepts of the beautiful and the sublime are primarily found in his work "Critique of Judgment" (1790). Here are the key points of his philosophy on these topics:

### **The Beautiful**

**Disinterested Pleasure:** Beauty is appreciated without any desire or personal interest. It is a pure aesthetic judgment.

**Universal and Necessary pleasure:** The judgment of beauty claims universal agreement, meaning that if something is considered beautiful, it should be seen as beautiful by everyone.

To say, something is beautiful is to claim universality for that judgement.

To say, this object is beautiful for/ to me is laughable.

**Purposiveness without Purpose:** Beautiful objects appear to have a purpose, but this purpose is not tied to any practical function. They seem to be designed in a way that satisfies our aesthetic sense.

### **The Sublime**

**Awe and Fear:** The sublime invokes a sense of awe and can be linked with feelings of fear and admiration. It is often associated with the vast, the powerful, and the infinite.

**Beyond Comprehension:** The sublime challenges our ability to fully grasp it, often relating to Nature's immensity or overwhelming power.

### **Two Types of Sublime:**

**Mathematical Sublime:** Related to the vastness of Nature, such as the infinite or the boundless (e.g., the night sky).

**Dynamical Sublime:** Related to Nature's power, such as storms or towering mountains, which evoke a sense of fear and admiration.

### **Edmund Burke**

Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of Sublime and Beautiful(1757)

### **According to Burke:**

1. Small things are beautiful. Darling is more beautiful than dear.
2. Smooth things are beautiful rough structures are sublime
3. Bright colours are beautiful. Dark colours are sublime
4. Delicate and fragile things are beautiful. Orange tree( delicate and fragile) is beautiful, oak tree( not delicate) is sublime.
5. Things with nice texture are beautiful.
6. Beautiful eyes: Clean eyes are beautiful, dark eyes are sublime.

Edmund Burke's distinction between the beautiful and the sublime is foundational in aesthetics. Burke articulates that the beautiful is associated with



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qualities such as smoothness, delicacy, etc. In contrast, the sublime is linked to vastness and a sense of awe and sometimes fear.

In literature, the sublime played a significant role, as seen in Wordsworth's "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey," where nature's grandeur elicits deep emotional responses (Wordsworth, 1798). Similarly, Friedrich's painting "Wanderer above the Sea of Fog" captures the awe-inspiring beauty of the natural world (Friedrich, 1818).

Romantic aesthetics extended beyond the arts, influencing philosophy, with Friedrich Schlegel advocating for the interconnectedness of art, philosophy, and life (Schlegel, 1797). This emphasis on subjectivity and individual experience resonated in various art forms, reflecting the Romantic spirit (Brown, 2008). Romantic aesthetics refers to the artistic and philosophical movement that emerged in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, characterized by an emphasis on emotion, individualism, and the sublime in artistic expression (Abrams, 1971). For Immanuel Kant, you may say: Kant emphasizes that beauty is tied to the subjective experience of pleasure, asserting in his "Critique of Judgment" that "beauty is a representation of the form of purposiveness in an object, by whose cognition the subject feels himself enlivened." (Kant, 1790, p. 47).

As for Edmund Burke, you can mention: Burke, in his work "A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful," discusses the sublime, arguing that it evokes feelings of astonishment and terror. He states that "whatever is in any sort terrible or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime" (Burke, 1757, p. 36).

Immanuel Kant's romantic aesthetics, as outlined in his "Critique of Judgment," emphasizes the idea of the sublime. For Kant, the sublime is associated with experiences that evoke a sense of awe and admiration, transcending the limitations of the imagination. Nature plays a crucial role in generating these sublime experiences.

On the other hand, Edmund Burke, in his work "A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful," explores the aesthetic concept of the sublime by focusing on the emotional response it triggers. Burke associates the sublime with feelings of fear and astonishment, often evoked by vast and powerful natural phenomena.

In comparing Kant and Burke, one can note their shared interest in the sublime but with distinct approaches. While Kant emphasizes the intellectual and reflective aspects, Burke focuses on the emotional and visceral reactions to the sublime.

Wordsworth's poetry often embodies Romantic aesthetics, emphasizing nature, emotion, and individual experience. His works celebrate the beauty of the natural world, portraying it as a source of inspiration and spiritual connection. Wordsworth's focus on simplicity, spontaneity, and the sublime reflects key Romantic ideals, inviting readers to engage emotionally with the landscapes and emotions he vividly describes. In poems like *Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey*, he explores the transformative power of nature on the human psyche, highlighting the importance of introspection and the connection between the self and the natural world. Romanticism influenced not only visual arts but also literature, with poets like Wordsworth and Keats embodying the movement's



ideals (Johnson, 2017).

### Literature Review

Arie & Pradnyani(2023) investigate identify the meaning of Wordsworth's poem entitled I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud by analysing its intrinsic elements. The present study is qualitative interpretive, focusing on the meaning conveyed in the poem entitled I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud using objective approach by interpreting the poem's intrinsic elements through repeated reading of the poem as a whole and its details to achieve trustworthy analysis and conclusion. Different from general trend in the analysis Wordsworth's I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud, the meaning of the poem is the experience of recalling the sight of the daffodils, which brought solitude to the speaker of the poem. The poem's subject was not the daffodils, but the experience of encountering them and its recollection. As a traveller traveling in the countryside, the speaker viewed the sight of the daffodils in a positive tone through imageries of sight, internal sensation, and muscle movements related to good experiences, as well as dictions of natural views with positive connotations. The poem includes simile, personification, metonymy, and symbols to compare the beautiful crowd of daffodils and the solitude they bring to the speaker of the poem's mind when he was recalling the sight of the dancing daffodils. Using Abram's objective point of view, the analysis reveals the daffodils as representative of Nature become the remedy for human's loneliness as represented by the speaker of the poem by recalling the experience of seeing them, sending the message that appreciation of Nature and the experience with Nature should be maintained to create a tranquil life.

Matarneh & Abuhamman (2021) investigate the representation of Nature in poetry, mainly in Wordsworth's and Al-Bohtory's poems. This study is based on the theoretical and analytical approaches of Russian Formalism that focuses on studying the linguistic aspects of the literary texts. Russian Formalism studies texts through "structures, imagery, syntax, rhyme scheme, paradox, personification and other literary devices" (Bressler, 2011, p. 49). The significance of the study lies in its purpose to introduce a comparison between two different poets whose cultural backgrounds, languages, traditions and societies are different. Wordsworth sees nature as the perfect place for tranquillity and pleasure. He emphasizes that man and Nature as basically adapted to each other, and the mind of man as the machine of depicting Nature. Wordsworth states that this pleasure comes from the human's interaction with Nature in its fascinating images of Spring, flowers, clouds, horses, rivers, castles, seas, gardens, and animals generally. Al-Bohtory also presents Nature as a place of pleasure and peace; he accentuates the profound relationship between Nature and man, and how Nature is admired by humans in its beautiful views. He explains that the beautiful images of Nature affect the human's mind and soul. Al-Bohtory portrays most of his poems in marvellous images of nature, such as Spring, horses, clouds, rivers, animals, castles, seas, and flowers. These two poets seek to glorify Nature and its magnificent impact on humans' life and pleasure. This poem has not been analysed through Romantic Aesthetics. This article fills the gap to analyse it through different theories of Romantic Aesthetics.



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Zeng(2018) points out that William Wordsworth is a representative poet in 19th century British romantic literature. "Nature" is an important theme of his poetry, on which he formed his "natural view" with different spiritual meanings and humanistic connotations. Based on the interpretation of his poems, this paper analyses the implication of his view of Nature and explores the cultural connotation embodied in it, which is of great significance to the clearer understanding of the characteristics of British romanticism and culture.

Welberry (1997) views that 'Daffodils' is deployed in both colonial and postcolonial contexts: that it is neither central nor marginal to British imperialism in itself, but has been found very useful at certain historical moments. His interest in this idea of 'deployment', probably quite reactionary and not all that exciting in itself, is in what is also swept up by implication when 'Daffodils' is deployed and redeployed.

Brydon(1982) observes that colonial writers experience difficulty in adapting the English language and English literary forms to the very different natural environments they experience in all parts of the Commonwealth. Anglo centric attitudes dictate the belief that Australia is the antipodes, the reverse of the true and Northern hemisphere, that North America is a wilderness that must be turned into a garden, that India and Africa are heathen to be converted or savage to be tamed. The native inhabitants of these countries are viewed as part of their barbaric landscapes, equally in need of change to meet English standards. Finally, an imported and in the colonial context an ossifying, Romantic tradition prevents immigrants and the native-born alike from seeing their natural environments with native eyes. As the chief representative of this Romantic tradition, Wordsworth looms large. This poem has not been analysed through Romantic Aesthetics. This research article fills the gap to analyse it through the theories of Immanuel Kant and Edmund Burke.

### Method and Material

This research is qualitative in nature. Immanuel Kant and Edmund Burke's theories of Aesthetics are applied to Wordsworth's poem *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*. This poem is the first source of data collection. Previous research done on Wordsworth is the secondary source of data collection. The approach is inductive. Research technique is interpretive content analysis.

Immanuel Kant, in his *Critique of Judgment*, explores the concept of the sublime and beautiful. He distinguishes between the mathematical sublime, evoking awe through vastness, and the dynamic sublime, associated with the overwhelming power of Nature. Kant's aesthetics emphasizes the subjective experience of beauty and the universal principles that govern it.

On the other hand, Edmund Burke, in his work *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, focuses on the sublime's emotional impact. Burke argues that the sublime arises from feelings of terror and astonishment, often associated with the vastness and power of Nature. His approach is more rooted in the emotional and sensory aspects of Aesthetics.

### Results

Immanuel Kant and Edmund Burke, influential philosophers from the 18th century, had distinct views on Aesthetics. Kant emphasized the universality of



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beauty, suggesting it is determined by pure concepts of the mind, while Burke focused on the sublime and the emotional impact of the natural world, highlighting the power of sensory experience. Both contributed to the understanding of romantic aesthetics, with Kant's emphasis on reason and form contrasting Burke's emphasis on emotion and the sublime in art and Nature.

Wordsworth's poem *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud* embodied Romantic aesthetics through a deep connection with Nature, a celebration of emotion, and a focus on individual experience. His poem reflected the Romantic emphasis on the sublime beauty of the natural world, allowing readers to connect with their own emotions and the transcendent power of Nature.

*I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud* by William Wordsworth reflected Romantic aesthetics through its vivid descriptions of Nature, emphasizing the beauty and emotional connection to the natural world. The poem celebrated the sublime, portraying the daffodils as a source of inspiration and joy, aligning with Romantic ideals of finding solace in Nature. Wordsworth's use of sensory imagery and the connection between the poet's emotions and the natural landscape embodied the Romantic notion of the individual's emotional experience in the midst of Nature.

### Discussion

Immanuel Kant, in his *Critique of Judgment*, discusses the sublime as an aesthetic concept. For Kant, the sublime involves a sense of awe and vastness, transcending comprehension. It emphasizes the subject's imaginative faculties and the feeling of the infinite. The enduring legacy of Romantic Aesthetics lies in its celebration of emotion, individuality, and the sublime beauty found in both human experience and the natural world (Clark, 2021).

On the other hand, Edmund Burke, in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, focuses on the sublime's emotional impact. Burke sees the sublime as rooted in fear and astonishment, often associated with vast, overpowering natural phenomena.

Both philosophers share an interest in aesthetics, exploring the emotional and intellectual responses to beauty and the sublime. While Kant emphasizes the role of reason and universal principles, Burke focuses on the visceral and emotional aspects of aesthetic experience. Their perspectives contribute to the rich tapestry of romantic thought. Romantic artists often draw inspiration from nature, reflecting the belief that the natural world holds profound beauty and spiritual significance (Jones, 2016).

Kant became the first modern philosopher to make his aesthetic theory an intrinsic component of a philosophic system when he devoted the major parts of his third Critique (*The Critique of Judgement*, 1790) to the issues of aesthetic judgement. In terms of the four moments, judgements of beauty are evaluated. To begin with, a judgement of taste is not a representation under a concept, but rather establishes a link between the representation and a unique disinterested pleasure- a feeling of satisfaction that is unrelated to desire or interest. Second, unlike mere sensuous pleasure, which imposes no responsibility to agree, taste of judgement lays claim to universal approval. Third, a thing with a purpose, but no function or purpose, evokes aesthetic satisfaction. Fourth, the beautiful is stated to have a necessary relation to aesthetic satisfaction that is when we are



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moved in this way by an object, we can guarantee that others will be moved in the same way. Pure aesthetic pleasure should allow for “ free play ”. Aesthetic contemplation should lead us to a state of disinterested reflection, which implies that we should be devoid of concerns about who benefits. The term “ disinterested ” refers to the act of contemplating a beautiful object for its own sake. Aesthetic experience should give us a sense of “ beyond ” something we can neither know nor understand but of which we get glimpses and hints. The aesthetic object must not allude to anything other than itself, according to Kant. In the second part of the eighteenth century, the search for essential and sufficient conditions of beauty and other aesthetic qualities proceeded with zeal. Edmund Burke’s essay “ A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful ” played an essential role in the argument. The first job is to describe what characteristics of objects evoke sensations of beauty ( love without desire) and sublimity ( astonishment without actual danger). The sensation of the sublime is accompanied by a sense of horror as the mind is held and filled by what it contemplates. The sublime and the beautiful are two very different concepts, with one ( the sublime) based on pain and the other (beautiful) on pleasure. The sublime and the beautiful are two sides of the same aesthetic coin in terms of aesthetic experience. As a result, any object that can elicit feelings of agony and danger, or is associated with such objects, or has features that can elicit such feelings, can be sublime. Burke goes on to say that sublimity is stimulated by obscurity, power, emptiness, immensity, and infinity. Small, smooth, gentle, and delicate objects can evoke feelings of beauty. The same scene can be both beautiful and sublime, but due to the conflict in numerous of their criteria, it can be very intensely one or the other if it is both. Burke inquires as to how perceptual qualities elicit sensations of beauty and sublimity, and he responds that they do so by eliciting psychological effects such as genuine love and horror.

Burke and Kant distinguish between the sublime and the beautiful. A bunch of flowers may be lovely, but it will not leave you speechless or entranced. Edmund Burke believed that what distinguishes the sublime is an element of horror. This is one of the most well- known definitions of the sublime.

*Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say ,whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. I say the strongest emotion, because I am satisfied that the ideas of pain are much more powerful than those which enter on the part of pleasure ( Burke, 1757,p.36).*

Simply stand on the edge of a cliff to get a sense of what Burke says. There is a part of us that enjoys putting ourselves in danger. The sublime, according to Burke, is associated with terror, mystery, darkness, and horror arising from the contemplation of the vast and infinite. God, according to Burke, is the most sublime. Aesthetics is subjective, and Immanuel Kant goes so far as to imply that men are more attuned to the sublime than women. Women, it appears, are more interested in the beautiful.

An unpublished essay on the sublime was written by Wordsworth himself. According to Brennan (1999), Wordsworth divides the sublime into two types:



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negative and positive. Only the dark side of the sublime is based on horror. Wordsworth agrees with Burke on this point. But, on the positive side, Wordsworth concurs with Kant. As a result, Wordsworth's sublime is both Burkean and Kantian in nature. However, both sides, according to Wordsworth, create a tremendous sense of unity and transcendence. Despite the fact that Wordsworth was clearly engaged in expressing and producing a sublime experience, it is nonetheless expected that in *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*, he would characterise daffodils as not just lovely, but also sublime. This impression is primarily created by the second stanza.

Wordsworth broadens the horizon and makes the picture appear grandiose by comparing the daffodils to glittering stars. The daffodils appear to be endless as they "*They stretched in the never- ending line*". A scene of awe is created by the incapacity of mind to properly absorb and contain the scene. There are "*ten thousand*" daffodils visible with only a "*single glance*"! The sublime is frequently associated with contemplation of the grandeur of the universe, as Edmund Burke pointed out. The grandeur is further enhanced by Wordsworth's majestic diction. Wordsworth uses personification to convert the daffodils into something alive, breathing companions that dance and flutter with joy. He even indicates a comparison to God's angels, who are commonly referred to as the "*heavenly host*" by using the word "*host*".

Wordsworth also introduces a sense of competition in the third stanza, which is a common feature of the sublime. The daffodils compete with the waves of the lake for the title of happiest flowers. "*The waves beside them danced; but they/ Outdid the sparkling waves in glee*".

The last stanza implies that not only nature, but also the workings of the human mind, are sublime. According to Hartman(1987), Wordsworth's poetry reveals a new attitude towards awareness- a radical consciousness of consciousness. Wordsworth is deeply a subjective thinker. The way the "inner eye" permits us to travel back in time is sublime in itself. In his poem *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*, Wordsworth points out that it is not just the flowers themselves that are sublime and beautiful. Our human ability for imagination also appeals us. This poem is both about nature and poetry about the mind. The poem reminds us of the wonderful nature of the mind that is sensitive to beauty and emotion. Kantian view of beauty is cognitive and universally communicable. Incorporating heightened emotion, Romantic artworks seek to evoke deep feelings and introspection among viewers (Brown, 2019).

*I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud* by William Wordsworth reflects Romantic aesthetics through its celebration of Nature's beauty and the emotional impact it has on the speaker. Romantic aesthetics champions the idea of individualism, encouraging artists to express their unique perspectives and experiences (Miller, 2020). The poem emphasizes the sublime experience of encountering a field of daffodils, conveying a sense of awe and connection with the natural world. Wordsworth's focus on individual emotion and the transformative power of Nature aligns with Romantic ideals. Romantic aesthetics, characterized by an emphasis on emotion, individualism, and Nature, has left an indelible mark on artistic expression (Smith, 2018).

### **I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud by William Wordsworth**





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*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.*

### **Kant( The Beautiful)**

Disinterested pleasure, universal and necessary pleasure, pleasure without purpose.

### **Burke( The Beautiful)**

Small, smooth, delicate, bright colour, nice touch

*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.*

### **Kant(The Sublime)**

**Mathematical Sublime:** Related to the vastness of Nature, such as the infinite or the boundless (e.g., never-ending line, ten thousand at a glance).

### **Burke( The Sublime)**

Vastness, infinity, potential, obscurity

*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:*

### **Kant( The Sublime):**

**Dynamical Sublime:** Related to Nature's power, such as storms or towering mountains, which evoke a sense of fear and admiration( they out-did the sparkling waves).

### **Burke(The Sublime)**

Powerful ( they out-did the sparkling waves)

*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 Beautiful)**

Universally communicable,( my heart with pleasure fills), disinterested pleasure, pleasure without purpose.

### **Burke( The Beautiful)**

Elegance(shape), gracefulness

## **Conclusion**



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Both Kant's and Burke's aesthetic ideas exist in Wordsworth's poem *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*. Kant's thoughts on beauty are that it is purposeless and that the daffodils' main purpose is to be beautiful. It is purely beautiful than functional. Like Kant, Wordsworth's concept of beauty is universally communicable. Wordsworth deftly blends Kantian beauty into Burke's sublime which instils horror in the mind of the spectator. Wordsworth used exquisite flowers to induce awe and terror in his readers. Daffodils, according to Wordsworth, are endless and continuous, like stars that show infinity (terror). We are too small in comparison to the vastness of the universe. Being alone is terrifying.

This article explored Romantic Aesthetics through vivid imagery of nature, portraying the emotional impact of the daffodils on the poet. The poem emphasized the beauty and transformative power of Nature, reflecting the Romantic era's focus on emotions, individual experience, and a deep connection to the natural world.

Kant and Burke, influential philosophers of the 18th century, approached Aesthetics and Romanticism differently. Kant emphasized the subjective experience of beauty, rooted in individual perception and universal principles. Burke, on the other hand, focused on the sublime, emphasizing intense, overwhelming emotions in response to the vast or powerful.

While Kant sought a rational foundation for Aesthetics, Burke delved into the emotive and passionate aspects of art and Nature. Both contributed significantly to the Romantic Movement, but their emphasis on reason and emotion set them apart in their approaches to the aesthetics of the sublime and beautiful.

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### Appendix

#### ***I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud by William Wordsworth***

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.