

Nature and Beauty: A New Critical Analysis of William Wordsworth's *My Heart Leaps Up!*

Jean-Marie Kazadi LUSUNA

Senior Assistant at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities
Department of Letters and English Civilization
Université de Lubumbashi – DRC

Abstract

This paper is a literary analysis of William Wordsworth's *My Heart Leaps Up*. To pursue and achieve the mentioned goal, New Critical analysis or approach will be applied in order to provide analytical tools to uncover the aspects of nature and beauty of the poem analysing the text itself.

This paper also uses the analytico-synthetic method which makes appeal to paraphrasing, linguistic and tense indications, the style used, the rhyme scheme, the type of meter used, the figures of speech, or the type of metaphor, and semantic structure consisting in the search of the meaning of the poem and the theme. It has the objective of helping students in literature with tools to analyse and understand romanticism poets.

“Paradox”, “Critiquing nature and beauty”, “biographical notes”, and “structure of the poem” are major arguments to be discussed under New Criticism. By analyzing the predominant concerns of these points, this paper brings light and reinterprets the serious matter of nature and beauty in the individual's life in society.

Keywords: New Criticism, Romanticism, The rainbow, Natural piety, The sky

Résumé

Ce travail est une analyse littéraire de l'œuvre de William Wordsworth intitulée « *My Heart Leaps Up* » (i.e. Mon cœur bondit). Afin de poursuivre et d'atteindre ce but, l'approche « New Critical Analysis » (i.e. Nouvelle analyse critique) sera d'application. Cet approche fournit les outils d'analyse pour découvrir les aspects de la nature et de la beauté du poème tout en analysant le texte lui-même.

Aussi ce travail utilise-t-il la méthode analytico-synthétique qui fait appel à la paraphrase, aux indications linguistiques et au temps, le rime, le type de mètre, les figures de style, ou encore le type de métaphore, et la structure sémantique. L'article a aussi pour objectif : aider les étudiants en littérature avec les outils pour analyser et comprendre les poètes du romantisme.

« Paradoxe », « Critique des concepts nature et beauté », « notes biographiques », et « structure du poème » sont là les arguments majeurs à discuter sous l'approche du Nouveau Criticisme. En analysant les préoccupations prédominantes de ces points, ce travail illumine et réinterprète le sérieux problème de la nature et de la beauté dans la vie d'un individu au sein de la société.

Mots clés: Nouveau criticisme – Romanticisme – L'Arc-en-Ciel – Piété naturelle – Le Ciel

Introduction

A poem can be “analyzed to discover its true or correct meaning independent of its author’s intention or of the emotional state, values, or beliefs of either its author or its reader” (Bressler, 2016, p.53). New Criticism asserts that the meaning of a poem cannot be explained simply by paraphrasing it, or translating it into everyday language, a practice that New Critics referred to as the *heresy of paraphrase*” (Tyson, 2006, p.137). In this paper, New Criticism has been overlooked to be applied on William Wordsworth’s *My Heart Leaps Up*. Moreover, Lunjwire (2010) argues that while teaching deep analysis of Anglo American Authors and Seminar, the following methods are used: The analytico-Synthetic and interro-Active. I believe that they are completing each other (Lunjwire, 2010, p.2).

Therefore, by tracking and analysing lines and stanzas in this paper, we will study the relationship between the poetic language and the feeling of the speaker. In *My Heart Leaps Up*, the admiration of the nature (the rainbow) by the speaker is explicit through the language expressions that appear in the poem. Wordsworth repeatedly emphasizes the importance of nature to an individual’s intellectual and spiritual development. A good relationship with nature helps individuals connect to both the spiritual and the social worlds. As Wordsworth explains in *The Prelude*, a love of nature can lead to a love of humankind. In order to achieve the goal of this paper, we will examine the text of *My Heart Leaps Up* from four different aspects such as: (i) Man and his life, (ii) the poem, literary analysis, and its structure, (iii) paradox, and (iv) critiquing nature and beauty.

1. Man and his life

William Wordsworth grew up in the Lake District of Northern England. Born in 1770, Wordsworth and his friend Samuel Taylor Coleridge invented a new style of poetry in which nature and the diction of the common man trumped formal, stylized language. William Wordsworth was an English poet, a key figure of Romanticism, and the author of the most famous poem ever written about daffodils.

2. The poem, literary analysis, and structure

2.1. The poem

<i>My heart leaps up when I behold up</i>	a
<i>A rainbow in the sky:</i>	b
<i>So was it when my life began;</i>	c
<i>So is it now I am a man;</i>	c
<i>So be it when I shall grow old,</i>	5 d
<i>Or let me die!</i>	b

The child is the father of the man c
And I could wish my days to be e
Bound each to each by natural piety. e

The technical term for the rhythm of this poem is “iambic Tetrameter”, that is, a line of verse consisting either of four dipodies (as in classical iambic, trochaic, and anapaestic verse) or four metrical feet (as in modern English verse) (Harcourt, 1985, p.293). Etymologically, *tetrameter* derives from Greek *tetrametron*, from neuter of *tetrametros* having four measures, from *tetra-* + *metron* measure (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). Harcourt asserts that an iamb is a two-syllable combination, where an unstressed syllable is followed by a stressed syllable (Harcourt, 1985, p.294). Therefore, in just nine lines, Wordsworth expresses a number of the several features of Romanticism: a love of nature, the relationship between the natural world and the individual self, and the importance of childhood in making the poet the man he becomes, memorably expressed by Wordsworth’s statement that “The child is father of the man”.

The tone of the poem is passionate. Wordsworth talks about how his heart “leaps” at the sight of a rainbow and exclaims how he would prefer death to losing his appreciation for the beauty of nature (Harcourt, 1985, p.303). To put it otherwise, the narrator tells about the feeling he gets, he has always gotten, and he will always get when he sees a rainbow in the sky. Therefore, his heart rejoices. He says that if he were ever to stop feeling this joy, he would want to die. This poem is about the “I” speaker’s identity as much as it is about nature, even if nature is an important part of this id.

This poem depicts the human and moral values when William Wordsworth indicates a strong human connection with nature. He seems to use the rainbow not only to recognize the awe of beauty within nature, but also to show that the rainbow brings some sort of peace within himself, making him a full man. In the Bible, God placed the rainbow in the sky to symbolize peace and the alliance with his people after flood Noah. God says: “I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life” (Genesis, 9: 11-13). The appearance of the rainbow in the sky reminds the “I” speaker in the poem the covenant made between Noah and God of the flood (Genesis 9: 8-17) after spending one year and two months (Genesis 8: 13-14).

Similarly to *My Heart Leaps Up*, *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood* by William Wordsworth is a poem about growing up and losing one's connection to nature. The poem begins with the "I" speaker mourning the loss of his youth and the deeper connection he used to have to the natural world. Therefore, man versus nature and childhood and adulthood are the major themes underlined in this poem. It reflects two things: the "I" speaker's infinite love for the natural world and his worries for those who forget the purpose of their existence. Also, in "*Ode: Intimations of Immortality*", Wordsworth depicts childhood as happy, glorious, spiritually sound, and free in its innocence. Experiences impressed on human consciousness during childhood are so important that they are never totally forgotten.

2.2. Literary analysis

The survey of literary analysis is created using "poem analysis" (<https://www.poemanalysis.com>) in order to penetrate the semantic of the poem. Therefore, this poem is analyzed in detail as follows:

Lines 1 – 2

*"My Heart leaps up when I behold up"
A rainbow in the sky:*

In the first lines of the poem, Wordsworth explains his reaction to a rainbow. Obviously, the poet has a deep affinity for the natural world. He says, "My heart leaps up." This is an extreme reaction to a not uncommon meteorological event.

However, rainbows are universally regarded as beautiful, but the rainbow in this poem is a symbol of nature and identity as a whole. Wordsworth's reaction is somewhat extreme. Most grown men do not react with the same level of enthusiasm to a rainbow. As the poem goes on, however, he will argue that we should all share his sense of wonder.

Lines 3 – 4

*"So was it when my life began;
So is it now I am a man;*

In these lines, the poet describes that he has always felt the same visceral, joyous reaction to a rainbow and to nature as a whole. His sense of wonder began when he was born

and persisted throughout his childhood, into his adulthood. As any other romanticist, Wordsworth has been a fan of nature from the very start.

Both lines begin similarly with the word “so”. This device, anaphora, is used to emphasize his idea. It also helps readers to understand that the meaning of these lines is internally connected.

Lines 5 – 6

*“So be it when I shall grow old,
Or let me die!”*

Wordsworth gets a bit extreme in these lines. First, he states that he hopes to continue to be mesmerized by nature well into old age. Then, he says “or let me die!” The fairly unambiguous interpretation here is that the poet would rather die than find the world around him boring and bereft of beauty. Death would be preferable to becoming a jaded cynic who cannot grasp the wonder of nature.

Line 7

“The child is father of the Man;

This is, perhaps, the most important line of “My Heart Leaps Up!” In his typical fashion, Wordsworth gives a seemingly straight-forward metaphor, which actually has enormous implications. All people were once children, so the line makes some sense on that level. We come from children as children come from their parents. The greater implication is that, as a parent, a child can be a great teacher and a great role model.

Similarly, children are constantly experiencing the world as if for the first time. They have an unending sense of wonder and awe regarding nature and, indeed, life itself. Wordsworth is saying we should be like children in this way and that we should hold on to our childhood sense of the world.

Lines 8 – 9

*“And I could wish my days to be
Bound each by natural piety.”*

In the last two lines of the poem, Wordsworth closes by reiterating the idea that he hopes to continue being in awe of nature. He wants every day to be tied together by an ongoing theme of love for the world. The words “natural piety” imply that the poet considered

his feeling for nature to be so reverent that seeing a rainbow was an almost spiritual experience.

Wordsworth was part of the Romantic Movement. The artists of this time elevated nature, discussing it as a part of the “sublime”, or something of great beauty beyond human understanding. This respect and reverence for nature are on clear display in this particular piece.

In this poem “My Heart Leaps Up”, the “I” speaker or narrator depicts the three stages of his life and the appearance of the rainbow in the sky, i.e. his childhood, his mature life, and then his old age. The rainbow is appearing during his three stages of life, the rainbow is appearing in the same way. Wordsworth sees his life as being in three phases. By phases one can mean a step or part in a series of events or actions: stages. Psychologists argue that the major stages of the human lifecycle include pregnancy, infancy, the toddler years, childhood, puberty, older adolescence, adulthood, middle age, and the senior years. But it is said that childhood is the best phase of our life, yet not for everyone.

2.3. The structure

There are many different types of rhymes that poets use in their work: internal rhymes, slant rhymes, eye rhymes, identical rhymes, and more. One of the most common ways to write a rhyming poem is to use a rhyme scheme composed of shared vowel sounds or consonants. The rhyme scheme is **abccdbcee**. This means that lines 1 rhymes (a), lines 2 and 6 rhyme (b), lines 3, 4, and 7 rhyme (c), line 5 rhymes (d), and lines 8 and 9 rhyme (e). In total there *My Heart Leaps Up* contains five rhyme schemes.

However, the poem’s simplicity carries over into its use of rhyme scheme. In the total of nine lines, each line ends with one of 4 sounds, each sound is repeated twice, except “man”, which ends two lines and is rhymed with “began”. Regarding the meter, the poem is written in iambic tetrameter. There are three variations: the second line is in iambic trimeter, the sixth line contains two iambs, and the last line is in iambic pentameter.

3. Paradox

A paradox is the expression of an idea that is contrary to expectations or existing beliefs. Paradoxes create deep and significant value for certain ideas which are not always

immediately apparent but once revealed, provides great insight in to a particular character, subject, or idea (Cave, 2009, p.147).

Cave (2009) argues that the paradoxes are powerful because they involve seemingly simple and strong arguments that lead to highly counter-intuitive conclusions (Cave, 2009, p.3). The word paradox derives from the Greek – ‘para’ and ‘doxa’ – ‘above, beyond, belief’ (Cave, 2009, p.1). A paradox underlines, also undermines, how we see ourselves in everyday life – and how, arguably we must see ourselves. In simple words, a paradox is a statement or illogical.

This paper exposes accepted types of paradox and the understanding of paradox in the poem under analysis, as argued below:

3.1. Veridical – Truthful paradox

This type describes a situation that is ultimately, logically true, but is either senseless or ridiculous. Veridical paradoxes are defined by the fact that the logic applied to a situation is ultimately true within the given context. The most famous example of a veridical problem involves a theoretical man who is 20 years old but has had only five birthdays. The resolution to the problem is that his birthday is on a Leap Day and only occurs once every four years. Although the situation is logically true, the statement is fairly nonsensical (“Three Types of Paradoxes”, n.d., para 1).

3.2. Antinomy

An antinomy or semantic self-referential paradox lays out a set of conditions and then asks a question, the resolution of which becomes self-contradictory, resulting in lack of a valid answer. An antinomy presents a statement, question or problem that seems to have no answer according to common sense or a pre-defined set of rules.

3.3. Literary paradox

This is a contradiction that resolves to reveal a deeper meaning behind a contradiction. For instance in John Donne’s sonnet 11 entitled “Holy”, the poet states: “Death, thou shalt die.” Initially, this line seems to be nonsense. After all, how can death die? But it can be interpreted to mean that the fear of imminent death does not exist in heaven.

3.4. Logical paradox

This is a contradiction that defies logic and is considered unresolvable. The Greek philosopher Zeno of Elea is credited for devising several famous logical paradoxes. In “Achilles and the Tortoise,” Zeno posits that motion is nothing but an illusion. If a tortoise were to get a head start in a footrace with Achilles, the tortoise would hold a lead since Achilles, fast as he might be, would have to continually close the distance between them.

3.5. Paradox in *My Heart Leaps Up*

In the line “The child is the father of the Man”, Wordsworth implicitly compares a child to a would-be father. This line is both metaphorical and paradoxical. “Child is father of the man” is an idiom originating from the poem “My Heart Leaps Up” by William Wordsworth. However, there are many different interpretations of the phrase, the most popular of which is that man is the product of habits and behaviour developed in youth.

On another errand, a father is a parent who has conceived (biological mother) or sired (biological father) rather than adopted a child and whose genes are therefore transmitted to the child. Also called birth parent. When it comes to child development, it has been said that the most crucial milestones in a kid’s life occur by the age of 7. In fact, the great Greek philosopher Aristotle once said, “Give me a child until he is 7 and I will show you the man.” To put it otherwise, it is easy to educate a child at 7 in order to make him become mature, because at this age the child obeys and he can adapt himself to the custom of society.

According to Tyrocity.com (<https://www.tyrocity.com>), the statement, “the Child is the Father of the Man” is paradoxical in the sense that it contains opposite ideas for normal people. The child cannot be the father; he is the man who can be the father. But, the poet through his statement “The Child is the Father of the Man”, wants to say that childhood is the beginning of manhood. It is known that the role of the man is instrumental behind the birth of the child. While Wordsworth used the phrase to express hope that he would retain the joys of youth, we often see this expression used to imply the establishment of both positive and negative traits in youth.

Once again, “the child is the father of the man” means that the behaviour and activities of a person’s childhood go a long way in building his/hers personality. In other words, the character that we form as children stays with us into our adult life.

3.6. Rainbow in some African cultures

My Heart Leaps Up by William Wordsworth centers on a rainbow, a symbol of nature and how the poet wishes to keep his childlike self-alive. This poem begins with reference to a rainbow. Whenever Wordsworth beholds it, his heart gets filled with enthusiasm and energy. He sees nature as an expression of the divine and beauty. Like most Romantic poets, he privileged it over civilization as a purer expression of God's presence on earth so is it for most Africans. Many of his poems celebrate the divinity, solace, and simple joy he found in the natural world.

However, in some African cultures, there is a particular thought and consideration of the rainbow. First, in addition to the divine symbol, Africans see the sign of peace through the rainbow just as it is said in the Bible. When a heavy rain threatens to fall, the appearance of the rainbow in the sky is believed in African thought as the cease fire. The rainbow's colours have each its meaning: hot pink for sex, red for life, orange for healing, yellow for sunlight, green for nature, turquoise for art, indigo for harmony, and violet for spirit.

From the metaphysical point of view, the rainbow is a cosmic substance different from other beings. Psychologically speaking, the Basongye people of the D R Congo, the rainbow is believed as a tailless snake of two heads (Merriam, 1974, p.134). It projects its colours upon the sky when it puts one of its head to the upstream and another head to the downstream of a river. The appearance of the rainbow rejoices the hearts of Africans as for Wordsworth. The rainbow is called "Mwanza Nkongolo", i.e. the king in Kiluba Katanga or in Ciluba Kasai of the DR Congo. The rainbow is considered as the king who ensures peace and joy in his people's heart.

From my informants, the Basongye people also view the rainbow as God's presence on the earth. They consider the rainbow as the nimbus so that they are to worship to get benedictions for the crops, fishing, and hunting. If someone dares to go to the river when the rainbow appears, he/she could die because he/she has met or seen God. Additionally, the rainbow is considered as the protector of people against the heavy and dangerous rain that could destroy houses, uprooted trees, and killed people. When the rainbow disappears, a slight rain falls to show the peace moment. Traditionally, the Basongye people see beauty of the nature in the rainbow by its seven colours and they admire it infinitely.

4. Critiquing nature and beauty

To critical thinkers, nature and beauty are nearly interconnecting, that is, they express the same idea about man and the universe. The main theme of this piece like most of William Wordsworth's poems is nature and beauty inside of nature. For him, nature is a true embodiment of God. A glimpse of the rainbow is like having glimpses of the divine entity. The Merriam-Webster dictionary sees nature in different ways. Nature is the inherent character or basic constitution of a person or thing, it is also a creative and controlling force in the universe, and finally it is an inner force (such as instinct, appetite, desire) or the sum of such forces in an individual. Whereas, beauty is the quality or aggregate of qualities in a person or thing that gives pleasure to the senses or pleasurably exalts the mind or spirit.

To understand William Wordsworth's thought, nature plays the role of giving joy to human heart, of purifying human mind and of a healing influence on sorrow stricken hearts. William Wordsworth takes pleasure in contract with nature and purifies his mind,' in lonely rooms, and mid the din of towns and cities', with the memory of nature. Psychoanalysts such as Sigmund Freud believed that the nature of the conflict among the id, ego, and superego change over time as a person grows from child to adult. Specifically, he maintained that these conflicts progress through a series of five basic stages, each with a different focus: oral, anal, phallic, latency, and genital.

Conclusion

The results of the analysis found the artistic features of poetic language in *My Heart Leaps Up*, through literary analysis, structure, and paradox. Through the analysis of Wordsworth's biography, the poem, and its structure, the paradox and the rainbow's symbol, the critique of nature and beauty has been demonstrated. The results of the analysis of this poem were realized thanks to New Criticism. The analytico-synthetic dimension showed the whole process of production, uses and dissemination of *My Heart Leaps Up!*

My Heart Leaps Up describes the pure delight the speaker feels upon seeing a rainbow. This joy prompts the speaker to reflect on the passing of time and the significance of childhood. It is in childhood, the poem argues, that people first feel a sense of powerful awe and wonder at the natural world around them. The idea of Wordsworth's, "My Heart Leaps Up," is that life is not worth living if one does not have an intimate relationship with nature. The speaker's heart metaphorically leaps up when it sees a rainbow in the speaker's present, as it did when he was a child, and as it will when he will grow old.

Finally, the application of paradox as a figure of speech in the poem suggested William Wordsworth's implicit comparison of a child to a would-be father and the idiomatic originating from the poem. The poem illuminates the idea that children understand Nature as a source of joy better than adults do.

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