

The Solitary Reaper

William Wordsworth (1803)

Behold her, single in the field,
Yon solitary Highland Lass!
Reaping and singing by herself;
Stop here, or gently pass!
Alone she cuts and binds the grain,
And sings a melancholy strain;
O listen! for the Vale profound
Is overflowing with the sound.

No Nightingale did ever chaunt
More welcome notes to weary bands
Of travellers in some shady haunt,
Among Arabian sands:
A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard
In spring-time from the Cuckoo-bird,
Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides.

Will no one tell me what she sings?--
Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
For old, unhappy, far-off things,
And battles long ago:
Or is it some more humble lay,
Familiar matter of to-day?
Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain,
That has been, and may be again?

Whate'er the theme, the Maiden sang
As if her song could have no ending;
I saw her singing at her work,
And o'er the sickle bending;--
I listened, motionless and still;
And, as I mounted up the hill
The music in my heart I bore,
Long after it was heard no more.

The following are posts by some readers. Read them and say whether you agree or disagree with them. I am not posting these messages because I share these people's comments. I want you to read the poem carefully, to respond genuinely to it before we analyse it together in class.

This poem focusses on the solitary life that people live as the woman was 'reaping and singing by herself'. The man, obviously affected by the woman's melancholy song, is too lonely looking at the woman and listening 'motionless and still'. The unhappiness of the loneliness shown through the song. It is truly a song of two strangers, alone, who will eventually die lonely. Unlike many poems and songs that suggest that the lonely parties age together, "The Solitary Reaper" shows that the loneliness is almost always forever as 'Long after, the music was heard no more' suggesting that the woman is dead, and the two remained lonely. Although this is the case, the imagery presents an almost a romantic picture, but the message is clear. They will never meet again. Posted on 2008-09-18

The poem 'The Solitary Reaper' written by William Wordsworth is about a young woman binding and cutting grain in a field. As she sings, the poem tells us that what she sings about is quite emotional. The poet took notice of this one day as he watched this woman get lost in her singing. 'The music in my heart I bore, Long after it was heard no more' these final lines express that this young lady has affected the poet. The poet used the line 'As if her song could have no ending' to explain how calm and peaceful her singing was.

The tone and atmosphere of this poem is very calm, emotional and peaceful. Imagery is used throughout this poem to help give readers a better understanding of what is actually going on. The poet creates a comparison between "No Nightingale did ever chaunt More welcome notes to weary bands Of travellers in some shady haunt, Among Arabian sands." and "A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard In spring-time from the cuckoo-bird, Breaking the silence of the seas Among the farthest Hebrides." You cannot hear a nightingale in the Arabian Sands, and you cannot hear a Cuckoo-bird in the Hebrides. This comparison is used by the poet to explain to the readers, how beautiful the singing is. Posted on 2008-06-22

The Solitary Reaper is a classic example of a poem from the romantic era written by William Wordsworth. It's about how a man, most probably Wordsworth is affected by a song being sung by this woman. The song of the young girl reaping in the fields is incomprehensible to him a "Highland lass," she is likely singing in Scots, and what he appreciates is its tone, its expressive beauty, and the mood it creates within him, rather than its explicit content, at which he can only guess.

Already from the beginning we can see patterns which are common to the romantic poets such as the title. "The Solitary Reaper" The romanticists usually focus on the individual itself furthermore it is common for the poems to be about one person alone in this instance the person is "Solitary..." The author further emphasises the fact that she is alone in the first stanza "Behold her, single..." and "...singing by herself" All through the poem we never find out who this person who is singing actually is, the author doesn't tell us anything about her this might be because this bares little importance. In addition we also see this idea of the poet being an individual in the last stanza when he says "I listen'd till I had my fill" He is using the first person of the singular which conveys the idea that the poet himself is the person listening to the song. The woman is perceived to be as one with nature through both the singing and the working. "Alone she cuts and binds the grain And sings a melancholy strain..." It seems as if she is in harmony with nature which again is common throughout the romantics as they sought wilderness and nature to be very important. At the end of the first stanza we can see Wordsworth describing the sound as if it were a liquid "Is overflowing with the sound." this is repeated again in the last stanza "...till I had my fill." The song is portrayed to be a liquid which is filling up both the valley where it is being sang and the poet himself like a container that needs to be filled up. Wordsworth makes several references to various historical locations and events some including "Travellers...Among Arabian Sands," "battles long ago," and "the silence of the seas among the farthest Hebrides." The girl's act of reaping and cultivating the land links the past with the future the land that supported her elders will continue to support the future land inhabitants. The author chooses to describe the sweetness of the song by comparing it to the singing of birds. "No Nightingale did ever chaunt..." and "...from the cuckoo-bird" The fact that he chooses to compare the singing of the lady to the singing of birds demonstrates how he feels about the song and how he thinks its beautiful. More over Wordsworth gives instructions throughout the first stanza. "Stop here" "gently pass" "O listen" In a way this shows the poets lack of contact with the woman and the fact that he does not want her to stop singing. The author also refers to different times, the past "And battles long ago." and the present "Familiar matter of to-day?" We can see this in the third stanza which is based around time, he's trying to figure out what the song is about and doesn't know if its about the past or the present.

The poem's structure is simple--the first stanza sets the scene, the second offers two bird

comparisons for the music, the third wonders about the content of the songs, and the fourth describes the effect of the songs on the speaker. Posted on 2008-04-23

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