

“The Solitary Reaper”



*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.*

Analysis

“The Solitary Reaper” is a short lyrical ballad, composed of thirty-two lines and divided into four stanzas. As the title suggests, the poem is dominated by one main figure, a Highland girl standing alone in a field harvesting grain. The poem is written in the first person and can be classified as a pastoral, or a literary work describing a scene from country life.

In **the first stanza**, the poet implores his listener to stop and look at the girl who is reaping and singing by herself in the field. The poet asks the listener to stop here or gently pass so as to not disturb the smooth flow of the song. As she “cuts and binds the grain” she “sings a melancholy strain,” and the whole valley is full of the song. The song sounds to the poet to be a sad one.

Wordsworth emphasizes the girl’s isolation by using words such as “single,” “**solitary**,” “by herself,” and “alone.” The girl is alone but surrounded by nature. The act of reaping alone in the field binds the girl to the earth. Also, as the girl sings and the melody fills the lonely valley, she becomes almost completely merged with nature.

In **the second stanza**, the poet compares the woman's song to sounds of two singing birds, saying that hers excels those of the nightingale and the cuckoo. The woman's sound is more welcome than any chant of the nightingale to tired travelers in the Arabian desert, and that the cuckoo-bird in spring never sang with a voice so exciting.



Nightingale

In **the third stanza**, the speaker is utterly charmed by the woman's song, although he cannot understand the language of the song and so cannot say what the song is about. The speaker tries to imagine what the song might be about. Because it seems sad, he guesses that her song might be about some "*old, unhappy things*," some past sorrow, pain or loss. Or it may be about some battles fought by her people long time ago. Or perhaps, he says, it is a simpler song about some present sorrow, pain, or loss, a "*matter of to-day*."

The poet ends the poem saying that as the speaker understands that whatever the reaper sings about, he listened “motionless and still;” and as he traveled up the hill, he carried her song with him in his heart long after he could no longer hear it. The beauty of the song had touched his heart and lingered in his mind, giving him joy as he traveled up the hill and carried her song with him long after he could no longer hear it.

The Hebrides



the Cuckoo

IMAGERY

The poem presents a natural scene in which the reaper is situated in the centre, working alone in the field. The two middle stanzas take us to different geographical regions: Arabia and the farthest Hebrides, where images of wandering nomads under the scorching sun contrasts with the sailors anxious to reach the land. For both groups, the singing birds signal survival and safety. The auditory imagery also preoccupies the poem, represented by the reaper's and birds' singing.

THEMES

Imagination:

“The Solitary Reaper” is about the power of the imagination to transform common, everyday events into representations of a larger reality.

The unity of Man and Nature:

The poem dramatizes the reaper amongst natural surroundings as she is bending on the ground and reaping the grain. The whole valley is filled with her song, echoing her sound. She is associated with singing birds.

FIGURES OF SPEECH

Metaphor: The poet compares the reaper with the nightingale and cuckoo respectively. He even claims that her song is more thrilling and more beautiful than those of the two birds.

Apostrophe: The poem begins with an apostrophe. The apostrophe is a figure of speech in which an imaginary person or thing is addressed as if present and capable of understanding.

- The poet aims at presenting the woman as a significant image in the poem through the description of her loneliness and the action that she is doing while she is alone in the field, "alone she cuts and binds the grain".

- In the first stanza, the poet focuses on the woman's song while she is reaping and he draws the reader's attention to listen to indicate the importance of the woman's song, "O listen ! for the vale profound...". The woman's song was sad but it fills the surrounding with her gloomy voice.

- In the second stanza, the poet starts to describe the woman's song. He considered it as a sweet song that is similar to the nightingale's ,her voice is agitating to the extent that the cuckoo-bird can never produce such voice during spring while it is so active.

Conclusion

- This is a delightful poem. The poet was on his tour of Scotland. he came across a lovely maiden. She was working in the fields all alone. She was singing a song. It was in a foreign language local dialect. Her song had a deep impression on the poet.

- It was due to her song that the poet composed this poem. The lovely singer appeared to be a part of the beauty of Nature. She represented its sweetness joy and mystery.

- The poet recollected this happy experience many time. It became a pleasure giving permanent possession. It could be retrieved like computer- memory. Thus. The music in my heart I bore. Long after it was heard no more.