The Solitary Reaper

William Wordsworth

Lyrical Ballads (1800)

Behold\(^1\) her, single in the field,
Yon\(^2\) solitary Highland Lass\(^3\)!
Reaping\(^4\) and singing by herself;
Stop here, or gently pass!
5
Alone she cuts and binds\(^5\) the grain,
And sings a melancholy strain\(^6\);
O listen! for the Vale profound
Is overflowing with the sound.

No Nightingale\(^7\) did ever chaunt\(^8\)
More welcome notes to weary\(^9\) bands
Of travellers in some shady haunt\(^10\),
Among Arabian sands:
In spring-time from the Cuckoo-bird,
Breaking the silence of the seas
10
Among the farthest Hebrides\(^11\).

Will no one tell me what she sings? –
Perhaps the plaintive numbers\(^12\) flow
For old, unhappy, far-off things,
And battles long ago:
Or is it some more humble lay\(^13\),
Familiar matter of today?
Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain,
That has been, and may be again?
20

Whate’er\(^14\) the theme, the Maiden\(^15\) sang
As if her song could have no ending;
I saw her singing at her work,
And o’er the sickle\(^16\) bending: –
I listened, motionless and still;
And, as I mounted up the hill,
25
The music in my heart I bore\(^17\),
Long after it was heard no more.
COMPREHENSION

1. **WHILE** you are reading the first stanza of the poem, make notes about:
   1. the setting;
   2. the characters involved;
   3. the addressee;
   4. the scene described.

2. **READ** the rest of the poem and answer the following questions.
   1. Does the poet know what the girl is singing?
   2. What hypotheses does he make about the content of the song?
   3. Does the poem deal with the girl's or the poet's emotion?

ANALYSIS

3. **FOCUS** on the layout. Is there a fixed rhyme scheme?

4. **CONSIDER** the second stanza.
   1. What does Wordsworth compare the girl's song to?
   2. What kind of feelings do the two comparisons emphasise?
   3. What kind of places do they introduce?
   4. What effect does the poet achieve through the visions he evokes in this stanza?

5. **ANALYSE** the language of the poem. It contains some references to the language of the senses. Identify the senses involved in the poet's experience and provide examples from the text.

6. **HOW** would you define the subject and the language chosen by the poet?