The Solitary Reaper

Like most of Wordsworth's poems, this poem is distinguished by its simple use of language and meter and its natural theme and imagery. It represents Wordsworth's belief in the value of the natural world, the strength of memory and the human mind and his first principle of poetry: that poetry should be written to offer enjoyment through a rhythmic and powerful expression of emotion and leave readers with 'a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' even long after it is read. Let's provide summary of the poem and then give its stanza wise explanation of the poem.

Summary of the Solitary Reaper

Wordsworth came across a lovely maiden at work in the fields all alone during his tour of Scotland. Her lovely song and the presence of some local dialect in a foreign language had a profound impression and moved the poet to write those verses. The poem expresses an emotion that the girl's song has aroused. This sweet and melodious song is full of romantic passion and appears to maintain his reflective mood until the end. This shows Wordsworth's love for nature and natural objects. The lovely singer appeared to be a part of the beauty of nature representing its sweetness, joy and mystery. Her song captivated the poet ears as well as the imagination. The poet felt from the tome that the song was melancholy. The song was more charming than the song of a nightingale or a cuckoo bird.

There was a thrill and excitement in it although there was no meaning in the words because the poet did not know the dialect. The poet wished he could know the songs' contents to intensify their impact. The poem doesn't give the girl's song any definite meaning. The meaning is as unknown to the reader as it is to the poet as he asks, is nobody going to tell me what she is singing? The poet depicts in the poem feelings of beauty charm and mystery. A reader of imagination experiences the same exhaustion as the poet had felt. It seems, however, that Nature impresses the poet not only when he is in direct contact with it, but also when he remembers its beauty. The girl's song leaves no impression unloosing to his mind. He listens to it motionlessly and heard no more rendering the poem romantic in nature and a thing of beauty to enjoy forever.

The poet wanders aimlessly on his way when she suddenly sees a girl alone in the field on the highland. The girl harvests the crop and is singing a song to herself. The poet likes to sing a lot. He asks the people who walk by there not to interrupt her in singing. He wants the people to

quietly stop where they are or pass from there. There's no one with the girl, and she cut and bind the grain all by herself. The poet observes the song she chants is full of sorrow and melancholy. The girl stands in the valley, and her song resounds through the valley.

The poet feels that the girl's song is very sweet. He finds her song sweeter than the song of the nightingale. The poet says that the nightingale's song gives relief and happiness to the travellers in the Arabian deserts when they stayed on Oasis. The poet feels the girl's song is thrilling also. He says that he has never listened to a more thrilling song than this. He even finds the girl's song more thrilling than the song of the cuckoo bird. The cuckoo bird sings her songs in springtime over the silent seas of the far away Hebrides.

The issue with the poet is that he can't comprehend the song of the girl. He doesn't know the language she chants in. He needs someone to tell him what the song means. Even telling him there's nobody around. The poet himself, therefore, began to conjecture the meaning or theme of the song. According to him, the song may be about past battles or some old, unhappy incidents. It may also be a matter the girl is familiar with. It can also be about some natural sorrow, loss or pain in the past that has happened to her.

The poet is incapable of knowing the theme of the girl's song. But that doesn't worry him. He still enjoys the song. To the poet, it seems the girl is not going to stop singing. Her song is never going to end. She will keep singing forever. The poet watches the girl sing and does her job. He stands there without making the movement of any kind. He listens to her song as well, without making any noise. He won't disturb the girl. He couldn't hear the girl's song when the poet walked up the hill. But the poet says he can still hear the sweetness and the song's melody in his memory. He is sure it will never be forgotten.

Stanza-wise Summary of The Solitary Reaper

1. Behold her. …….. with the sound.

The poet sees a Highland girl in the field. This girl is reaping the crop and singing to herself. The poet likes this scene. He says to the passers-by either to stop there quietly or to pass from there without making the least noise. The girl is cutting and binding the crop alone and also singing a song. This song is of sad nature. But the poet likes it very much and wants everybody to listen to it. The song is also echoing in the valley.

2. No Nightingale …….. farthest Hebrides.

The poet thinks that even the nightingale famous for its singing to the tired travellers in the Arabian desert when they take rest at an Oasis, cannot sing better than this girl. The singing of the girl is also better and more thrilling than the Cuckoo-bird which sings in the spring season and then breaks the silence of the seas among the faraway Hebrides.

3. Will, no one tell …… may be again?

The poet is unable to understand the language in which the girl is singing. He does not know the theme of the song and wants somebody to tell him the theme. He thinks that the song is about old, unhappy incidents or of some battles in the past. The song can also be about some familiar matter related to the life of the girl. The song may also be about some natural sorrow, pain or loss which has happened to her.

4. Whate'er the theme …… heard no more.

The poet does not think too much about the theme of the song. He is enjoying the song heartily. The poet thinks that there is no end to the girl's singing as if she will never stop singing. He watches her singing and using the sickle to do her work at the same time in the field. The poet says that he listened to her song without making any kind of movement and noise. When the poet walked up the hill he said he still remembered the song music which that highland girl sang. The poet also says he will remember her singing all the time.