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The Solitary Reaper

February '13

William Wordsworth

Summary: William Wordsworth's solitary reaper, a short lyrical ballad, conveys the theme of ironic beauty of melancholy over more positive feelings such as joy projected through the song of a highland lass. Composed of thirty two lines and divided into four stanzas, the poem is dominated by one central figure, a highland girl standing alone in a field harvesting grain. The poem is written in the first person and can be classified as pastoral, describing a scene from the country life.

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In the first stanza, the poet indicates how the solitary highland lass is reaping and singing a song which is incomprehensible to the poet. The poet urges not to disturb her in her work and her singing. He suggests one either watch her or gently pass from the scene. The poet highlights how the solitary reaper sings a melancholic strain tune while

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doing her work. The poet emphasises how the entire valley is flowing with the sound of the song.

In the second stanza, the poet is all praises for the tune of the song. The poet is unable to understand the language of the song but the tune is quite expressive. In this stanza, the poet employs literary device of metaphor and hyperbole to emphasise the enchanting quality of the song. The poet categorically says that no nightingale did ever chant in such a mellifluous voice, the quality of the voice of the reaper surpassing that of the ~~good~~ cuckoo-bird in spring.

In the third stanza, the poet tries to conjecture about the themes of the song. Given its melancholy tune, the poet feels that the theme of the song might be of some natural sorrow, loss or pain or of battles fought long ago.

Finally, the poet concludes that even if he cannot grasp the