

THE SOLITARY REAPER (1805)

This poem was inspired by an experience the poet had while out walking in the Highlands of Scotland.

Text Four

- ■ While reading the poem, note down what you are told about:
– the characters – the actions – the setting.

*Behold*¹ her single in the field,
Yon² solitary Highland³ Lass⁴!
Reaping and singing by herself;
Stop here, or *gently* pass!

**Behold... whom is
the poet addressing?**

Why gently?

5 Alone she cuts and binds the grain,
And sings a melancholy strain⁵;
O listen! for the Vale⁶ profound
Is overflowing with the sound.

10 No Nightingale did ever chaunt⁷
More welcome notes to weary⁸ bands
Of travellers in some shady haunt⁹,
Among Arabian sands:
A voice *so thrilling* ne'er was heard
In spring-time from the Cuckoo-bird,
15 Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides¹⁰.

Will no one tell me what *she* sings! —
Perhaps the plaintive¹¹ numbers¹² flow
For old, unhappy, far-off things,
20 And battles long ago:
Or is it some more humble lay¹³,
Familiar matter of today?
Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain,
That has been, and may be again?

25 *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 sickle¹⁴ bending: —
I listened, motionless and still;
30 And, as I mounted up the hill,
The music in my heart I bore,
Long after it was heard no more.

More welcome notes than...

so thrilling as...

she refers to...

Whate'er the theme, does the poet understand the words? at her work, what was she doing?

The music of what?

2 The second stanza contains two comparisons. They tell the reader about the quality of the reaper's song.

- What is being compared to what?
- What do the two comparisons have in common with the reaper's song?
- What kind of landscape do they suggest? Can you relate it to the Highlands?

3 The third stanza discusses the possible subjects of the reaper's song. Say what they are and if they have got anything in common.

4 Consider the language the poet uses. What is the tone of the poem? Quote from the text.

1. *Behold*, observe (guarda attentamente).

2. *Yon*, old use for (standing) 'over there'.

3. *Highland*, of the Highlands, the mountainous region of Scotland.

4. *Lass*, girl, still used in certain parts of Britain; e.g., Lancashire.

5. *strain*, song (canto).

6. *Vale*, old use for (standing) 'over there'.

7. *chaunt*, chant, sing (cantare).

8. *weary*, tired (affaticati).

9. *haunt*, place (luogo).

10. *Hebrides*, islands off the Scottish coast.

11. *plaintive*, mournful (tristi).

12. *numbers*, musical sounds (note).

13. *lay*, song (canto).

14. *sickle*, tool used for cutting corn (falchetto).