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## About the poem

- ❑ The poem was written on Nov 5, 1805 and published in 1807 in *Poems in Two Volumes*.
- ❑ it is written in four stanzas of eight lines each.
- ❑ most of it is in iambic tetrameter – four unstressed and four stressed syllables in a line.
- ❑ the rhyme scheme is sometimes abcdbdee or ababccdd.





## *Detail about poem*

- The poem is based on someone else's experience
- Wordsworth was inspired by a passage written by Thomas Wilkinson, a traveler, during his tours in the book 'Tours to the British Mountains'
- The passage that inspired Wordsworth is as follows: 'Passed a female who was reaping alone: she sung in Erse (the Gealic language of Scotland) as she bended over her sickle; the sweetest human voice I ever heard: her strains were tenderly melancholy, and felt delicious, long after they were heard no more' (as quoted in The Norton Anthology English Literature).



## Summary of the poem

- ❑ The poem is written in the first person
- ❑ It can be classified as pastoral, describing a scene from the country life.
- ❑ Poem is dominated by one central figure, a highland girl working alone in the fields harvesting grain, and singing melancholic song. The poet cannot understand her but is mesmerized by the beauty of it all. He moves away from the scene but the impact and memory of the scene stay with him.
- ❑ The central ideas is how deep melancholy projects feelings of joy and happiness.

## The poem

Behold her, single in the field,  
**Yon** solitary Highland Lass!

The beautiful girl is working **alone** in the cotton  
fields of Scotland (the Highland)

'Lass' is a maiden, a young girl  
'yon' is from yonder, or that one



## First Stanza

Reaping and singing **by herself**;  
Stop here, or gently pass!



'**Reaping**' is to cut grain for harvest with scythe, sickle or reaper  
Poet describes her movements and actions: she is reaping and singing at the same time

But she sings for no one in particular

Her movements are fluid like and gentle – she is oblivious of her surroundings and only engrossed in her own work.

Her loneliness is emphasized, through repetition of words, also in the title.

Poet urges not to disturb her in her work and singing. He suggests that one should either watch her or gently pass from the scene.

## Second Stanza

Alone she cuts and binds the **grain**,  
And sings a **melancholy strain**;

'**Grain**' is the fruit of cereal grass

'**melancholy**' means sad

'**Strain**' is the tone or the tune

For the fourth time the **sense of loneliness** is attached to the whole scene; it gives the impression that the girl is removed from our world

In these lines her next chores are mentioned: she has cut the grain and is now binding the grain



## Second Stanza

O listen! for the **Vale profound**  
Is **overflowing** with the sound.

'Vale profound' is the deep valley  
'overflowing' means reverberating or resounding  
Wordsworth now changes his stance: first she was  
only singing to herself but now the whole valley  
listens to her and is filled by her sweet song.  
There is a sense of joy and respect for the girl and  
her song in Wordsworth's remark, 'O listen!'





### Third stanza

No Nightingale did ever chaunt  
More welcome **notes** to weary bands  
Of travellers in some **shady haunt**,  
Among Arabian sands:



‘**chaunt**’ is a simple melody, a song sung repeatedly

‘**notes**’ musical notes, song

‘**weary bands**’ are tired travelers

‘**shady haunt**’ is like an oasis in the desert, a paradise for travelers of deserts with date trees, water and birds.



### Third stanza

Wordsworth compares the girl's song and its musical quality with that of Nightingale's song

He feels that the maiden's song even surpasses the song of the Nightingale as it is heard in the Arabian deserts by the tired traveler.

Nightingale bird is so called because it sings at night as well as during the day; it means 'night songstress.'

The bird is famous for its song; its song is loud and louder when in urban environments, in order to overcome the background noise.

## Forth Stanza

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**.

'**thrilling**' means causing intense excitement & pleasure

'**Cuckoo-bird**' is a solitary bird that seldom occurs in pairs; generally known as shy bird, more often heard than seen.





### Fifth stanza

Will no one tell me what she sings?  
Perhaps the **plaintive numbers** flow  
For old, unhappy, far-off things,  
And battles long ago:



‘**Plaintive numbers**’ refer to the sad music of the  
song

Wordsworth here wants to know the content of the  
song she is singing.



### Sixth Stanza

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?

#### 'humble lay' sad song

Wordsworth wonders again what the song may be about,  
and connects the past, present and the future.

Emphasis is again on pain and loss.



### Seventh Stanza

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;

'**sickle**' is an instrument to cut grass, a curved blade  
Wordsworth emphasizes the beauty of the song and  
its power to lure – the song appears not to have an  
ending.



## Eighth Stanza

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.



Wordsworth describes two effects of the song on him:

1. He stood 'motionless and still' – entranced by the beauty of it
2. He moved away but carried it in his heart



The scene is described both in the present moment and in the form of memory  
Both have pleasant effect on the poet

### Important Themes

1. Recollection and role of memory in creation of art.
2. Close association with nature – nature as source of serenity and peace.
3. Simplicity and purity of rustic life – not burdened with miseries of urban industrialized life.



# General Analysis

- ❑ The **language** of the poem is simple and close to language of 'common people'
- ❑ The **setting** of the poem is rustic and emphasis is on the girl's isolation from the world

