

ANALYSIS OF "THE SOLITARY REAPER"

1 - CONSIDER THE TITLE

Right from the title the intelligent reader understands the content of the poem may deal with somebody's feelings and may expect the poem is set in the countryside. "Solitary" is an adjective that hints to feelings of solitude. Also "reaper" recalls countryside activities. Therefore the reader may be curious to find out the reason for the reaper's feelings.

2 - DENOTATIVE ANALYSIS

A careful reading of the poem will show the text deals with the poet's memory of a scene he happened to live while walking in the country. The speaking voice sees a young lady from Scotland while she is reaping in the country: she's alone and while working she's singing. Her song is melancholic and its echo effect fills all the valley. The effect is so pleasant that the poet invites any passer-by to stop and listen or to walk on without disturbing the lady's singing. The second part of the poem mainly expresses the poet's comparison of the girl's song effect with the chant of a Nightingale, refreshing some tired travelers along the sands of an Arabian desert. In addition the reaper's song is also compared to the voice of a Cuckoo-bird that seems to disturb the silence of the Hebrides. All in all, the pleasant atmosphere and the positive mood conveyed by the girl's song seems to win all competitions.

The poet is curious about the possible content of the song, probably, because he cannot make out the precise words of the song. He wonders whether somebody is able to tell him what the reaper's song is about. But, on a second thought, he does not seem to be really interested in any of the possible hypothesis he has made about the song content (the song may be about unhappy experiences of the past, perhaps battles of a very distant time or even about some tragic family experience or loss or sorrow) because what really matters to him is that he was totally captured by the scene and the song and such feelings are so strong that he still feels that music in his heart. The poem ends with the poet's regret he can no longer listen to that song.

3 - STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

The text is organized (arranged) into four octaves, each one playing a definite function in the economy of the poem. The first octave introduces the scene, the second one expresses the poet's comparisons, the third conveys his curiosity about the content of the girl's song, to end up with the poet's conviction that the real thing (what really matters) is the pleasant feelings of the girl's music which he still misses.

4 - CONNOTATIVE ANALYSIS