

AMAZEMENT, LONGING AND PORTRAYAL OF NATURE IN WILLIAM WORDSWORTH'S POEM "THE SOLITARY REAPER"

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Note

William Wordsworth is admired as the great worshipper of nature and its glories. He wrote about the various aspects of nature profoundly and vividly. His poems are his deeply felt feelings that reflect his love for nature which is his God. "The Solitary Reaper" is one such poem which expresses his beautiful thoughts in lyrics. His amazement, longing and love for nature is deeply felt, and mesmerizingly reflected in this tremendously powerful poem.

Amazement, Longing and Portrayal of Nature in William Wordsworth's Poem "The Solitary Reaper"

William Wordsworth's name is synonymous with romance, beauty and wonder at the miracles of nature and love. His poems are a celebration of life, nature, solemnity and all the diverse forms that they represent. Nature almost always takes a centre-stage in Wordsworth's poetry. It is never mentioned flippantly or in a lighter vein. It is invariably, almost transcendental.

William Wordsworth was born at Cockermouth, Cumberland, on April 7, 1770. He spent his childhood in the lap of nature, and was educated at Hawkshead Grammar School, and Cambridge University. He was immensely influenced by France and its political thought in his youth, and visited that country in 1791, and even toured the stunning Alps.

As a poet of nature, Wordsworth is incomparable and exceptional. His poetry is purely that of nature's splendours. Wordsworth's poems are mystical, spiritual and simply inimitable. Nature has a harmonious, and an ideal co-existence with man's soul in Wordsworth's poetry. He is a sage, a worshipper and a philosopher of nature.

Wordsworth has also written about the devastating effects of, the Industrial revolution in his poems, like "The World Is Too Much With Us". In striking contrast to this tragedy of excessive

development and modernization, in his poem “Ode to Intimations of Immortality” Wordsworth writes, “...my heart leaps when I see a rainbow...”

Wordsworth’s poetry reflects his own struggles with his mind, and his despair with too much concentration, on the material aspects of life, as well as the heartless industrialization, during his day and age, which impacted and disturbed him profoundly. His humanity is majestically and beautifully woven in to his poetic art, and its expression is unanimously one with the universal consciousness.

The charming imagination of his craft, along with a determined pantheism, makes him divine and one with the spiritual, and heavenly qualities of poetry, that are seldom witnessed so vividly in the works of any other poets before and after him. Wordsworth advocated the philosophy of returning to nature, in all its beautiful aspects, amidst the chaos and depression of the heartless, remorseless and cruel modern industrial civilization.

Wordsworth’s poetry could essentially be called the poetry of amazement, at the wonders of nature, and the poetry of village or country life, as well as the poetry of childhood, and the ever charming, as well as, inexhaustible beauty of the human soul. His poetry is not only autobiographical, but also an embodiment of his divine excellence, expressed through the pure human heart and soul. The confluence of all nature in its various facets is expressed with crystal clarity in all his poetry, as Wordsworth spent his childhood and youth in the lap of nature, with spiritual mastery much more superior to that of others, who were not fortunate enough like him, or endeavoured to, profoundly express their love for nature, like he did.

William Wordsworth’s “The Solitary Reaper” is a marvellous poem, which portrays beauty and simplicity in a style, that is unique and vivid. This lyric poem was written on November 5, in the year 1805, it was published in 1807. The poem describes a highland or mountain-girl, from Scotland, working and singing by herself in a farm, when the poet was passing through a valley, the poem describes in detail, how this whole experience mesmerized the poet and his sensibilities. He wanted to treasure this experience and share it with the whole world.

Wordsworth writes:

“Behold her, single in the field, yon solitary Highland Lass!
Reaping and singing by herself; Stop here or gently pass!
Alone she cuts and binds the grain, and sings a melancholy strain;
O listen! for the vale profound Is overflowing with the sound.
No nightingale did ever chant
More welcome notes to weary bands
Of travellers in some shady haunt.
Among Arabian sands:
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.
Will no one tell me what she sings?
Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow for old, unhappy, far-off things,
And battles long ago: 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?
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;
I listen’d, motionless and still;

And, as I mounted up the hill,
The music in my heart I bore.
Long after it was heard no more.”

This beautiful lyric poem opens with the description of the lovely Scottish mountains, and a solitary upland girl singing, in a striking voice, which captivated the poet. The poet saw a beautiful young girl, “a highland lass” working by herself in the magnificent Scottish highlands, “... reaping and singing by herself.” He decides not to interrupt her and conveys the same feeling to his readers, as whatever song she is singing is too overwhelming for his senses, and stirs as well as enhances his positive and genuine, sanguine emotions, and makes the realization of living in the lap of beautiful nature, more profound and deeply heart-touching. The whole valley is overflowing with the fascinating song of the dazzling singer. The second stanza tells of two comparisons. The poet feels that even the nightingale and cuckoo-bird, famous for their poignant and melodious songs, cannot compete with the innocent melodies of the highland girl's song.

The nightingale's song might have been bringing joy to the “weary bands of travellers in some shady haunt, Among Arabian sands” but he finds the beautiful song of the girl much more vitalizing and is completely taken-in by it. Similarly in spring time, the cuckoo bird's songs might be “breaking the silence of the seas, Among the farthest Hebrides,” but they are nothing compared to the effortlessness and awesomeness of the song of the innocent girl, cutting and binding the grain, “ And oe'r the sickle bending;”-

In the third stanza the poet thinks about as to what, the subject matter of her songs could be, and the fourth stanza tells of, the wonderful influence of, the girl's song on the poet's mind, heart and soul. The poem is divided in to four eight line stanzas, and it is written in iambic tetrameter. The rhyme scheme of the poem is abcbdde and ababccdd.

The universal themes of melancholy, magnificence, life, divine love as manifested through nature, have all been expressed with straightforwardness, pathos and a loveliness which in itself is matchless. The girl is singing in Gaelic, a language which is not understood by the poet, but the flamboyant musical attractiveness of her song is so eye-catching, that the poet cannot stop himself, from admiring the magnificence of her voice and wonders as to what could be the subject matter of her song. Is it about some day to day family problem, or a song that describes the battles which have been fought long ago, or some melancholic problem and sadness.

Wordsworth is amazed at the astonishing beauty of nature, and longs for the minimalism of the pre- industrialized times, when life was much easier and uncomplicated. Most of Wordsworth's poems are based on his own personal experiences in background of nature, and amazement at its power. “The Solitary Reaper” is distinctive, because it is believed that the poem is based on Thomas Wilkinson's experiences as written by him in “Tours to the British Mountains”, it is said that William Wordsworth was inspired by the following passage: “ Passed a female who was reaping alone : she sung in Erse (the Gaelic 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 by him in the Norton Anthology, English Literature).

Wordsworth's sense of misery, and mourning the preposterous and ludicrous extremes of the modern industrial revolution, equals his longing for and admiration of the beauties, and bounties of divine nature that he so admires. Nature has indescribable powers over mankind, emotional, psychological, physical and psychic, as well as spiritual. Man's thoughts and actions have been influenced and enhanced by the dynamic power of nature, as well as, its subtle and mellowed sweetness, a fragment of which is expressed through this poem.

Wordsworth's spirituality is deeper and finer than doctrines, dogmas and rituals. His beliefs are deeply coloured in the beauty and longing for everything, which is ensconced with nature. The rivers, the mountains, the waterfalls, the meadows, the flowers, the birds, the trees, all inspire him, and motivate as well as stir his intense emotions and passions. His poetry becomes better, with each passing encounter, with the stunning, and divine magnificence of nature's wealth bestowed on human beings.

Wordsworth's amazement and longing for nature is a spiritual quest for the exploration, and advancement of not only his soul, but also that of his readers, who admire his poetry. "The Solitary Reaper" portrays his longing for the simplicity of life. His art attains a divine manifestation in the company of nature. Wordsworth's "The Solitary Reaper" accurately represents his values, and express that, the amazing grandeur, brilliance, and marvel, along with the supremacy of nature, shall always remain far more relevant, and superior, to things that are simulated, man-made and superfluous.

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