**The Solitary Reaper**

By [William Wordsworth](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/william-wordsworth)

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 chaunt

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 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.

**EXPLANATION OF INTIMATION ON IMORTALITY**

In the first stanza, the speaker says wistfully that there was a time when all of nature seemed dreamlike to him, “apparelled in celestial light,” and that that time is past; “the things I have seen I can see no more.” In the second stanza, he says that he still sees the rainbow, and that the rose is still lovely; the moon looks around the sky with delight, and starlight and sunshine are each beautiful. Nonetheless the speaker feels that a glory has passed away from the earth.

In the third stanza, the speaker says that, while listening to the birds sing in springtime and watching the young lambs leap and play, he was stricken with a thought of grief; but the sound of nearby waterfalls, the echoes of the mountains, and the gusting of the winds restored him to strength. He declares that his grief will no longer wrong the joy of the season, and that all the earth is happy. He encourages a shepherd boy to shout and play around him. In the fourth stanza, he addresses nature’s creatures, and says that his heart participates in their joyful festival. He says that it would be wrong to feel sad on such a beautiful May morning, while children play and laugh among the flowers. Nevertheless, a tree and a field that he looks upon make him think of “something that is gone,” and a pansy at his feet does the same. He asks what has happened to “the visionary gleam”: “Where is it now, the glory and the dream?”

In the fifth stanza, he proclaims that human life is merely “a sleep and a forgetting”—that human beings dwell in a purer, more glorious realm before they enter the earth. “Heaven,” he says, “lies about us in our infancy!” As children, we still retain some memory of that place, which causes our experience of the earth to be suffused with its magic—but as the baby passes through boyhood and young adulthood and into manhood, he sees that magic die. In the sixth stanza, the speaker says that the pleasures unique to earth conspire to help the man forget the “glories” whence he came.

In the seventh stanza, the speaker beholds a six-year-old boy and imagines his life, and the love his mother and father feel for him. He sees the boy playing with some imitated fragment of adult life, “some little plan or chart,” imitating “a wedding or a festival” or “a mourning or a funeral.” The speaker imagines that all human life is a similar imitation. In the eighth stanza, the speaker addresses the child as though he were a mighty prophet of a lost truth, and rhetorically asks him why, when he has access to the glories of his origins, and to the pure experience of nature, he still hurries toward an adult life of custom and “earthly freight.”

In the ninth stanza, the speaker experiences a surge of joy at the thought that his memories of childhood will always grant him a kind of access to that lost world of instinct, innocence, and exploration. In the tenth stanza, strengthened by this joy, he urges the birds to sing, and urges all creatures to participate in “the gladness of the May.” He says that though he has lost some part of the glory of nature and of experience, he will take solace in “primal sympathy,” in memory, and in the fact that the years bring a mature consciousness—“a philosophic mind.” In the final stanza, the speaker says that this mind—which stems from a consciousness of mortality, as opposed to the child’s feeling of immortality—enables him to love nature and natural beauty all the more, for each of nature’s objects can stir him to thought, and even the simplest flower blowing in the wind can raise in him “thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.