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WORDSWORTH'S «THE SOLITARY REAPER»: GENDERED SPACE AND THE IDEOLOGICAL STRUCTURE OF THE ROMANTIC LYRIC

In the article object of analysis is the literary work of the nineteenth century poet William Wordsworth «The Solitary Reaper», which is an example of romanticism literature. Researcher defines features of the way narator, or romantic lyric hero, comprehend surroundings, illustrated in the figurative picture of the poem, and his own place in it. Special attention is concentrated on the image of nature and lyric heroine, from the description of which by lyric hero author forms characteristics of the last one.

«Both of them [Wordsworth and Darwin] derive from history itself a sufficient reassurance about the value of the story they have to tell. They look back far into the past and suppose that if one can look back far enough the origin ceases to be of much concern.»

D. Bromwich, A Choice of Inheritance

«Being, as it were, under-mothered (early orphaned) and over-natured (living in the Lake District) may then have given Wordsworth far greater psychological dependence on the feminine than either himself or critics male and female have allowed for.»

J. P. Ward, «Will No One Tell Me What She Sings?:

Women and Gender in the Poetry of William Wordsworth»

In a lecture about the Italian Romantic poet, Giacomo Leopardi, Francesco De Sanctis, the nineteenth century literary critic, observed that in many of Leopardi's poems we have a clear and powerful sense of the poet's need to be affirmed and loved, but what is not as clear is that the poet is himself capable of giving the affirmation and love that he seeks. De Sanctis goes on to say that in the case of Leopardi we have a poet who would rather be kissed than give a kiss. In a very concrete and demonstrable sense the male Romantic poet, whether in Italy, England, France, Russia, Germany, Spain or elsewhere, more often than not, would prefer to be the object rather than the dispenser of genuine sympathy and affection. In his self-conscious role as lyric poet his primary concern remains himself and his own feelings and reactions, and this concern frequently obliterates or minimizes the presence of women in Romantic poetry. For the Romantic poet the universe revolves around his ego, and his extreme self-consciousness often excludes the notions of genuine care and responsibility for others. Such an observation might easily be dismissed as another one of those facile contradictions that so frequently seem to define that revolutionary yet reactionary figure of the Romantic poet whose love of nature is often not matched by a generous love of his fellow man. I contend that

what the introduction of a consideration of gender, a consideration of the nature of this frequent marginalization of women in Romantic poetry, does in this context is to suggest new ways to interpret both the gender-shaped strategies of the male Romantic poet and that ideological distance between the lyrical «I» and the woman in those typical Romantic lyrics in which the ostensibly affirmed or desired woman is so often removed to the margins of the text. That distance or space between the male poet and the woman in the text constitutes an imagined but effective barrier enabling the poet to make it highly unlikely for any demands to reach him across that ostensibly great divide between self and Other. This is a self-constructed abyss arising from the creative self-absorption that is at the very heart of the Romantic lyric. Demands from the Other for recognition as a self, as opposed to an object of discourse have the potential to divert the Romantic poet's attention from his concern in the poem with himself («the egotistical sublime», to use Keats's description of Wordsworth) and with his own feelings. If the chasm or distance opened up in the poem between the poet and the female object of discourse prevents the poet from receiving a kiss, it also allows him to avoid reaching out and risking himself to bestow a kiss.

It was no less a figure than William Word-

sworth's friend, collaborator, and fellow poet, Samuel Taylor Coleridge who (echoing De Sanctis on Leopardi) observed of Wordsworth: «Wordsworth is by nature incapable of being in Love, though no man more tenderly attached». Wordsworth's «The Solitary Reaper» is one of the most anthologized of his poems. Two, by now, classic examinations of Wordsworth's poetry, Geoffrey Hartman's *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814* and Frederick Garber's *Wordsworth and the Poetry of Encounter*, begin with extended discussions of this poem. By their choice of «The Solitary Reaper» to introduce their investigations of the Wordsworthian poetic opus they point to the exemplary character of this poem as a guide to understanding many of the concerns of Wordsworth's poetry as a whole. «The Solitary Reaper» is a more accessible and representative poem of European Romanticism than even the acknowledged major poems such as «Tintern Abbey», *The Immortality Ode*, and *The Prelude*. In «The Solitary Reaper» the poem is presented almost as a painting, a brief and fleeting landscape meditation captured by the imagination. It does not present itself as having those didactic or aggressive «palpable designs» to which Keats objected. Nor does it call attention to itself as having a profound or subtle message to convey about the great truths or insights associated with those «spots of time». As such, for what it excludes as well as for what it includes, it has been admired as one of the more successful examples of the transformative power of Wordsworthian, i. e., Romantic, memory and imagination.

In «The Solitary Reaper» there is an obvious physical and not so obvious psychic distance between the poet and the «Highland Lass.» The poet-narrator speaks *about* the young woman, but not to her. The poem functions as a deceptive rhetorical strategy that holds out, initially, the implicit promise of a focused view of an idealized female, but it delivers instead a view of the poet's own sensitivity. This poem was written in 1805 and published in 1807. Wordsworth's first published poem, «On Seeing Miss Helen Maria Williams Weep at a Tale of Distress», had appeared in 1787 and, similarly, his apparent concern with a young woman revealed itself as primarily concerned with himself and with his own reactions and feelings. What these two poems, separated by twenty years, share is the experience of the voyeur on the part of the poet. Much of what Adela Pinch observes about Wordsworth's youthful 1787 poem has resonance for «The Solitary Reaper» as well: «The voyeuristic

premise of the poem, its claim to be privy to the sight of a woman who is absorbed in a presumably involuntary experience... is intimately linked with the poem's erotic tinge» (80). We note that in «The Solitary Reaper» the «Maiden» is removed physically from where the poet stands. We know that she is to be seen at work and singing in the field. At the very beginning of the poem then the distance opened up between observer and observed, between subject and object, is the safe space (for the poet-narrator) established by and through the poem, a buffer zone that the poet has the capacity or *power* to diminish, though he does not have the *desire* to diminish that distance or space between himself and the female object of discourse. This same distance serves to define, in part, what it means to be a male, Romantic poet, since that space represents the sense of absence that defines the task of the poet, namely, to find figures for the absent referent. In this endeavor the poet makes that gendered space, that distance or separation in which the woman's difference is situated, resonate with substitutions for the literal. It is the literal - symbolically represented by the solitary reaper - that remains outside the figurative re-presentations of the poem. From a Lacanian perspective the use of figurative language itself may appear to be both the admission and the demonstration that the object of desire, the fascinating woman created in the poem exclusively through the two senses of sight and hearing, is finally, *from the poet's perspective*, distanced and never substantially there even in the imagined landscape. If this solitary laborer is the creation of the visual and auditory, then she stands in a long line of spiritual or non-corporeal women in Western poetry who fail to achieve a substantial presence in poems they *seem* to occupy. Just as vision situates the Other at a distinct remove from the observer, so too does hearing establish a space or distance across which sound moves to a receiver, and these particular senses, sight and hearing, are traditionally regarded as the more spiritual as opposed to corporeal senses - touch, smell, and taste - that activate our «knowledge» of the object as a verifiably concrete, physical entity. One of the ironies of Romantic creation (and a source of its tension) is precisely this fact that the process of idealizing the woman through senses that, at least since Provençal and Dolce Stil Novo poetry, are associated with the more spiritual or ethereal senses, also serves patriarchy's need to assert her proximity to nature. The exaltation and idealization of the woman serve to differentiate her status as lit-

erary statuary - in harmony with the garden, with the landscape, and with nature-from the self-representation of the male protagonist whose model of perfection is the more admired, heroic (and thus hierarchical) notion of a quester whose final or ultimate development is always yet to be, and thus never really final, and whose identity, as a consequence, is intimately associated with the notions of progress and growth.

In the opening lines of the poem we have distance or space presented not as a condition, but rather as a defining characteristic of the relationship between the poet-narrator and the woman he sees:

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

If distance is established at the beginning of «The Solitary Reaper», then the text is even more emphatic about the isolation that characterizes the woman's disposition in the text: it is asserted that she is isolated, alone in the landscape. The first five verses identify her through the terms, «single», «solitary», «by herself», and «alone». In order for the poet-narrator to seduce the reader to enter his perspective and vision of the poem's experience he sets the scene for us; the problem in the poem is that, to reverse Lacan's formulation, the male poet does *not* know what he is saying. A feminist perspective on the poem clearly reveals that, contrary to the poet's declarations, the reaper is not, in any meaningful sense, distant, since that space between the poet and the woman in the text will be a function of gender, and not an unambiguous, objective description.

Aside from the suspect and slippery notion of being alone that informs this landscape, there is another and equally perplexing qualification that textuality itself interposes here. The actual situation or reality of isolation or being alone is that «alone» cannot position or conjure up another presence or consciousness and still be understood as «alone». Once the poet-narrator speaks, once language is directed to an auditor, then another presence is implicated by and through the text. This audience may also be «ideal», but it is nonetheless «real» as it functions within the linguistic parameters and literary conventions established by the poem. Just as reading requires the narrator to be constructed, so, too, does the auditor have to be

constructed from the various linguistic cues. Even if one were to construe the poem's commands and questions as merely rhetorical - the poet addressing himself- then one is compelled to conceive of the poetic voice as having a double valence, namely that of lyrical «I» *and* auditor or first reader of the text. If the poem then is conceived of as a quintessentially Romantic gesture, the record of the poet communing with himself, then what M. H. Abrams identifies as the traditional «audience» must, of necessity, be seen as second readers of the text; the poet as confidant (receiver) of his own message being the first reader. Regardless of our rhetorical or non-rhetorical reading of those imperatives and interrogatives in Wordsworth's poem, we are invariably confronted with multiple presence in the very act of actualizing the poem. It is this quandary to which Maurice Blanchot alludes when he points to the manner in which the poet necessarily calls into question the text's assertion of solitude. Since, Blanchot implies, the text can never be single or alone:

It is comical for a man to recognize his solitude by addressing a reader and by using methods that prevent the individual from being alone.

The word *alone* is just as general as the word *bread*. To pronounce it is to summon to oneself the presence of everything the word excludes ...

How can a person be alone if he confides to us that he is alone?

He summons us in order to drive us away; he muses on us in order to persuade us that he is not musing on us; he speaks the language of men at the moment when there is no longer, for him, either language or man. It is easy to believe that this person, who ought to be separated from himself by despair, not only retains the thought of some other person but uses this solitude to create that obliterates his solitude.

Herbert von Einem's comments about Friedrich's famous painting, *Zwei Manner in Betrachtung des Mondes* are quoted by Wieland Schmied in his book on Caspar David Friedrich, and points out that the depiction of solitude by the artist creates a bond with those who would enter that experience and paradoxically, qualifies that notion of solitude: «Der Erfahrung der Einsamkeit entspricht die Erfahrung der Bindung durch das gleiche Schicksal» («The Experience of solitude leads to the experience of bonding through a sense of a shared destiny»). I shall return to this painting later in my essay in order to show how gender considerations shape the nature of the narrator's textual invitation to share his perspective and experience in the work of art.

In the poetic landscape described in the poem

not only is the solitary reaper *not* alone, she is, as I suggested earlier, only marginally there, having been eased aside by the powerful subjectivity of the poet and through the series of images to which her voice and song are compared in the second and third stanzas of the poem:

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?

These figurative substitutions serve to mark a shift in focus from the woman to her voice and song, but, just as important, they mark the contours of a space between subject and object in which the observer or subject remains a person who retains his status as a particular consciousness to which we relate the concerns and affirmations of the poem. This consciousness serves to establish the poetic identity in the poem as a *man* aware of himself, as the speaking subject distinct from both the natural landscape and the solitary reaper. Concomitantly, in this same space, the apparent object of initial «concern» or interest is no longer a person - the «Lass» - but rather a thing, the voice and its song. While the integrity of the male subject is constant, the woman progressively (!) loses her specificity in being transformed from active agent to a voice and, finally, to a song. The surface simplicity of the poem belies the complexity of the numerous fictions (male fantasies) that support its structure. A fiction created by the poet is that the woman is at the center of the poem's focus and concerns, but, as in truth it is a poem about the emotional experience of the poet, we see that this assumption helps to ground an ideological structure or fiction whose parts *depend* upon that distance the poem would have the reader believe the poet would overcome.

With this outline in mind of the ideological structure of the Romantic lyric we may begin to re-interpret the most basic assumptions under which the poem has been traditionally presented and ac-

cepted. We discern that within that context of gender-shaped poetic strategies distance itself becomes a relative term. If the reader is commanded to imaginatively «Behold ... Yon solitary Highland Lass», then we are encountering contradiction from the very beginning of the poem. From the poet's perspective, the solitary woman is «yon», «out there» or distant, a distance that increases throughout the poem, yet she is not so far away from the poet that she cannot be seen performing a specific task, i. e., reaping. If the precise visual details («she cuts and binds the grain») call into question just how far away she is, then the fact that she is close enough for the poet to not only hear her singing, but also near enough for him to identify the strains of that song as «plaintive» or sad further qualifies that notion of distance. He does not guess about the character of her specific actions in the field. There is no ambiguity, no suggestion of other possible tasks that she might be performing given the distance emphasized. Conjecture does occur in the poem, but not in the context of her physicality. What the perspective and unstable meaning of «distance» allow is the identification of this notion of separation as - in this poem - a peculiarly male space: it is apparent that while the poet-narrator sees *himself* *Qī* wishes to see himself as significantly removed from the woman, he also regards her as near enough to be available for his own purposes. The pleasures of drinking in the physicality, real or imagined, of the «Maiden» from the safe distance occupied by the poet as subject and the woman as object is a classical description of voyeurism. He is arbitrarily and imaginatively distant (his fictional distance being also dependent upon maintaining her ignorance of his presence) while she is sufficiently proximate for him to discern those specific, almost minute, details about her physical activity and her song that further qualify our understanding of the space separating poet-narrator and Scottish peasant (We learn later in the poem, when the narrator is «physically» even *more distant*, that she uses a «sickle»). Once a gender perspective is introduced into our reading of the poem we discover that the distance opened up by the poet-narrator between the subject (himself) and the object (the reaper) is a space that is manipulated and contradictorily defined by the poet. This gendered space, understood in terms of an ultimately problematic separation from the woman, finds its meaning as «distance» defined by the particular needs of the poet. Primary among these is the need to present his song - the poem - rather than her

song: all that we know about the nature of her song consists of his emotional reaction to it.

Distance itself is a central device in the Western tradition of the pastoral, to which genre Wordsworth's poem belongs (I am not using pastoral in the strictly classical sense, but rather in the more modern, inclusive sense of the term that comes through Frank M. Chambers, Geoffrey Hartman, M. H. Abrams, and Stuart Curran). Indeed, it is Curran who suggests that we should regard Wordsworth «as the greatest of England's pastoral poets». The idylls of Theocritus and Moschus, Virgil's *Eclogues*, Tasso's *Aminta*, and Milton's «Lycidas» are speaking pictures, artworks in which distance or an established space between narrative voice and the pastoral scene is understood as a defining element of the poem's decorum, a decorum that is sometimes only precariously maintained. In Romantic art the distance between artist and the scene presented is seen as diminished or largely non-existent since in Romantic aesthetics the work of art is seen as the expression of the feelings or inner life of the artist. Whether one examines during the Romantic period the paintings of Constable, Turner, and Caspar David Friedrich, the music of Beethoven, or the poetry of Wordsworth, Mōrike, Coleridge, Keats, Becquer, Leopardi, Pushkin, Lamartine, or Mickiewicz, one discovers that the artist is a participant in the scene, in that the feelings of the artist color and inform that scene. Certainly Constable's *The Haywain*, Friedrich's *Der Einsame Baum*, Wagner's *Siegfried Idyll*, Tchaikovsky's *Sixth Symphony*, and Leopardi's pastoral poem, «Canto notturno di un pastore errante dell'Asia» are feelings and emotions that have all taken the form of art. In Romantic art the depth of the artist's personal feeling is usually assumed to be translated into a bond with the subject matter or object of discourse. This, in fact, does happen even in Romantic «nature» and pastoral poems in those instances in which the poet-narrator *identifies* with his male protagonist, as when Mōrike in «An eine Aôlsharfe» laments the death of his brother, or when Leopardi identifies his own anxieties and fears with those of his wandering shepherd in the «Canto notturno...», or when Friedrich translates his ever new wonder and surprise in the face of nature's monumentality into his traveller in *Wanderer Ober dem Nebelmeer*. In none of these examples is there an identification with nature, but rather, a feeling *through* nature, and, indeed, in these works there is more awe, almost a Burkean or Kantian fear of nature, rather than an intense and

passionate love of nature. In «The Solitary Reaper» there is no male figure other than the poet-narrator himself in the pastoral landscape, and there is no real identification made between the narrative voice and his female object of discourse.

In spite of all the evidence to the contrary in the poem, some critics of Wordsworth see this poem establishing a relationship with the solitary reaper. If as Nancy Chodorow, Carol Gilligan, and Margaret Homans contend, masculine identity is forged in terms of separation, then it should not surprise us that a masculinist reading of the poem sees intimacy and relationship precisely where a feminist view of the fearful distance constructed or alleged by the poet-narrator implies an inability to enter into relationship with the woman. Though the poet-narrator never addresses the woman nor overtly makes his presence known to her, masculinist criticism of this poem does, nevertheless, as I have indicated, assert a relationship between the two. Once again we are confronted the reality that within the context of a phallogocentric culture it is sufficient for the male to assert or assume relationship or a degree of intimacy with the woman regardless of her disposition towards him: within the masculine economy of the poem relationship - which is implied by the reaction of the poet-narrator to her voice and song - becomes the prerogative of the authoritative male voice and, like «distance», its meaning is also defined by the desires and needs of the poet. The poet-narrator's admiration and rapture in the presence of the woman's song, and his subsequent claim to have captured that music are sufficient warrant for patriarchal culture to assume that there is now a bond or relationship between poet-narrator and woman in the poem, as if her disposition in the text were of no importance. That the notion of the validity of the masculine claim to relationship could go unchallenged in literary culture means that the poem has usually been read from the masculinist perspective. This perspective assumes that since the woman in the literary text is like tissue or Kleenex - insubstantial and easily discarded when used - there is no need to contextualize her nor imagine that her disposition in the text could be of any relevance in determining or complicating such aesthetic and ideological coordinates as «distance» or «relationship».

Woman, as a solitary reaper, can have meaning within that masculine economy of the poem only to the extent that she resonates with or corresponds to masculine needs and priorities as articulated in and through the poem. Her imaginative

transformation in the poem, as well as that of her song are indices that point towards Romantic imagination as the manifestation of masculine desire asserting itself in the text. Thus, that specific distance between poet-narrator and woman is seen as a necessary distance, as it is that imaginatively manipulated space that enables the male subject to exploit the feminine as the site of desire. Nearness or genuine intimacy would destroy that carefully *constructed divide that allows the woman to function* as an object. His rapture aside, intimacy is not what is being sought or bridged in the poem, as genuine closeness or intimacy would represent a threat to exploitation of the Other as represented by the woman, and the poet must exploit her as a present absence, since as such she provides him with *both* an occasion for the poem itself and a built-in rationale for his ideal reader to sympathize with the poet for the note of sadness or melancholy in the face of her distance. This distance can also imply indifference manifesting itself as a lack of awareness on her part! The very conventions upon which the poem depends in order to be understood within culture immediately place the woman in a psychologically and morally dubious, if not compromised, position. The result, consciously or unconsciously, for the poet's ideal reader, is a gradual, almost imperceptible, transfer of interest and sympathy from the solitary reaper to the poet-narrator that begins with the seventh line of the poem («O listen! for the Vale profound/ Is overflowing with the sound».) in which the reader's attention for the first time in the poem is directed away from the physicality of the «Highland Lass», and this transfer of interest is all but completed by line twenty-seven («I saw her singing at her work».) when the poet-narrator asserts himself openly for the first time as the subject of the poem. As if to leave no doubt about the new locus of interest and sympathy in the poem «I» is repeated three times in the next four lines. By banishing the woman to the margins of the text Wordsworth insures that the poet-narrator (easily identifiable with Wordsworth himself), rather than the woman, becomes the true subject of the poem.

That the poet feels the need to banish her should tell us something about the insecurities that the male poet often had about an activity that his age did not always see as virile or real, «manly» work. The male poet needed to demonstrate to a rapidly industrialized age that regarded his creative work as just another commodity item that he, all appearances to the contrary, was *not* engaged in an ac-

tivity of marginal importance, and that his work did involve commanding, ordering, and controlling the Other. In this regard we should note that from the very first stanza of «The Solitary Reaper» Wordsworth not only assumes that he knows enough about his audience or ideal reader to address himself (*as* narrative voice) directly to that reader with complete confidence, but he even dispenses with, as preparation, any *captatio benevolentiae* and *begins, with the first word of the poem, to issue orders to the reader: «Behold, «Stop here», «gently pass», and «O listen!»* The presence of four commands in the first eight lines (One might venture that «O listen!» may be read as an exclamation that mutes the force of its character as an imperative) is itself noteworthy in a lyric poem whose dominant intonation seeks to communicate rapture or enchantment. What is even more remarkable in the poem is the poet's assumption that the narrator can command or persuade the reader to enter the poem exclusively from the angle or perspective provided by the poet. Such audacity is possible in part because, as Raymond Williams reminds us, the poet in early nineteenth century industrial society was regarded as «a special kind of person», with a special kind of sensitivity and knowledge. Terry Eagleton would later contend that the Romantic artist as a «special kind of person» also was performing a kind of mythical function for an industrial society, supplying the myth of unity and meaning in his poetry for an age that saw itself as ever more fragmented and its labor as alienated and meaningless.

The male Romantic poet establishes his «mettle», his credentials as artist, by his ability to manipulate not only the woman in the text, but the ideal reader as well. If this ideal reader, who is assumed to be male, shares the perspectives and values of the male poet, then that same reader is, to a greater or lesser extent, conceived of by the poet as a reflection of himself, a confidant, as Keats conceives of his ideal, male reader in his «Ode on Melancholy» when he advises:

Or if thy mistress some rich anger shows,
Emprison her soft hand, and let her rave,
And feed deep, deep upon her peerless eyes.

These lines clearly indicate that the audience is male («thy mistress») and shares Keats's perspective that woman is stereotypically «soft», and that she, much as a child or a deranged person, raves. Keats, just as Wordsworth in «The Solitary Reaper», loads his gender inflected-rifts with ideological ore - to give a twist to Keats's 1820 letter to

Percy Shelley. Just as Wordsworth constructed his male bonding with his reader through a series of commands within a single, brief stanza, so, too, does Keats establish his link with his male reader through a series of virile commands, «Emprison», «let her rave», and «feed deep», concentrated into three lines. In both poems this concentration of imperatives gives a sense of urgency to the poet-narrator's voice, and it is this note of urgency or anxiety that the male reader recognizes most readily - even if subconsciously - as the link that connects him to the narrator. It is the recognition of male solidarity ultimately grounded on a fear of the female as Other, as she who can occasion and uncover the vulnerability of the male Romantic poet as exclusive subject and hero in his «own» world.

Both «The Solitary Reaper» and «Ode on Melancholy» serve to advance a relationship between poet and audience that subtly reinforces the poet's status as teacher and guide through not only the «experience» represented in the poem, but also through the masculinist values, presented as normative, prescriptive, and universal, and which are embedded in the poetry. In the case of Keats, his masterful control of language, the felicity of tone and rhyme, along with his precocious translation of cultural codes into a reassuring literary articulation of traditional gender roles and attendant socially encouraged conduct and attitudes all serve to conceal the appalling nature of the advice he offers his male audience in his poem.

While Wordsworth's commands and implied notions of appropriate conduct towards the maiden do not directly exclude women readers from his audience of ideal readers, it is nevertheless true that Wordsworth's poem requires women to read against themselves, as in this Wordsworthian landscape the woman is but a reflection of nature as the objectified Other. That command, «Behold», that asks the narratee to participate in the poet-narrator's view of the woman working *over there* («yon») in the field serves not only to differentiate the female object of discourse from the subject-narrator, but that command also serves to establish a genuine solidarity of the narrator with the narratee who must be conceived as physically or ideally near in order to receive a command that does not alert the maiden to his or the poet's presence in this landscape. Just as in Keats's poem, the ideal reader is ideally male, and the poem serves as a cultural invitation to become complicit in the objectifying male gaze. On the fictional and aesthetic level - the level of male fantasy - the wom-

an can be read as the fascinating object of aesthetic contemplation, but on the larger, non-idealized cultural and historical levels the Highland Lass becomes the prey of the all-male safari, a prey that must be stalked and approached with caution, a caution that reveals a fear of the consequences of her returning the spectator's gaze and thus uncovering the spectator's own nakedness, his cloak of invisibility (and thus power).

The nearness between narrator and narratee suggests an intimacy or solidarity between the poet and the ideal, male auditor (an intimacy that is ultimately a substitute for the intimacy with the female object of discourse) who will symbolically share both the space and the perspective- in both senses of *view* and *values*) of the poet. The shared perspective also serves to define «us» as a confederation of «we», poet and audience, who, in order to actualize the poem along the lines of phallogocentric vision offered by the narrator, must see the maiden as not only Other, but different from «us» because she also lacks what the poem implies narrative guide and narratee share, i. e., that secret (secret in the double sense of undisclosed and phallic) vantage-point from where the woman in the text may be viewed and where the male viewers are neither obstructed nor challenged in their positions as voyeurs. Consequently, the extent of the distance between narrative voice and the solitary reaper is also a function of difference, a difference between the speaking-viewing subjects and their object.

The referentiality of the familiar or what seems to be familiar also establishes a common point of reference or sharing that can become a kind of bond encouraging identification between the narrator and the narratee, an identification that enables the ideological perspectives of the narrator to be validated as that Barthesian «what goes without saying.» The homoeroticism present in the masculinist construction of this poem - an element present in much of the Western tradition of amorous and lyric poetry - finds resonance not only in Romantic literature, but also in Romantic painting. One of the most striking demonstrations can be made by comparing two Romantic paintings by Caspar David Friedrich. The artist's ability to substitute male for female viewer in order to establish a particular kind of sharing or intimacy (and thus community) through the work of art may be seen by comparing Friedrich's previously-mentioned painting, *Zwei Männer in Betrachtung des Mondes*, with his *Mann und Frau in Betrachtung des Mondes*. Both paintings are variations on a similar scene. A couple gazes

through a nightscape at the moon, which is at the center of both paintings and which captures the couple's rapt attention. This moon, so dear to the heart of the Romantics, is, in both paintings, framed by the gnarled and other-worldly shape of menacing-looking oak and spruce trees. Instead of a frontal view of these couples Friedrich presents them to us with their backs turned (*Rückenfiguren*) and intent only upon the mysterious face of the moon, as if to emphasize the importance of the poet's private vision and rapture, as if entrance into these lunar mysteries must be mediated through the fascination of these couples. In *Zwei Manner...* the couple consists of two men, who are generally understood to be the artist, Friedrich, on the right, and his student. In *Mann und Frau...* the couple consists of the artist once again on the right and, in the painting, once more closer to the moon, and a woman who is usually regarded as his wife. In both paintings the artist's partner leans upon his left shoulder. In the former painting there is both intimacy and affection implied by the stance of the student whose body is leaning towards the artist, and who rests almost his entire arm upon the artist's shoulder. They are painted so close to one another that they almost seem to be united except for the small spaces that separate their waists and legs. In the latter picture the woman's hand and upper arm rest lightly, almost tentatively: upon the artist's shoulder and there is no real sense of intimacy communicated, as she stands stiffly, as does he, straight ahead. While there is even less physical space between the two figures than in the former painting, nevertheless her form is, in shape and color, totally distinct from his, whereas in *Zwei Manner...* the two men are dressed in nearly identical clothing and in identical colors. The posture of the two men on the stony and sloping ground is a more relaxed and comfortable stationing than we find in *Mann und Frau...* where the posture or attitude of man and wife is almost military. The warmth of the colors in the former painting, predominantly brownish-gold and green-gray serve to emphasize the humanity of the two male figures, while in the latter the dark colors, primarily charcoal and purple almost seem to swallow up the human characters. The colors also give the scene, especially the framing oak, a more menacing or eerie character than it has in the other painting, and the dark brown of the woman's dress makes her barely distinguishable from the earth from which she seems to arise, thus re-enforcing the association of woman with nature or the material.

In Wordsworth's poem, in spite of this tendency of the narratee to assume aspects of the stance and perspective of the narrator, there is the dynamics of the text itself that requires a reading of itself as more than or, at least, different from the message or instruction given by the narrator. This dynamics of textuality that compels us to differentiate between the narratee as a position in the communicative act and the reader who is concretized through the act of reading and interpreting a text depends upon what Ross Chambers refers to as «the textual function». This transaction Chambers carefully describes as «a collaborative event that arises from the relation between a text and its reader, or, more precisely, from the relation between a piece of writing and an instance of reading». It is in the moment when collaboration and validation of the narrator and the narrative act gives way to the interpretive act that Wordsworth's poem seems both more and less than an innocent and enthusiastic episode in the poet's literary life.

What then is the nature of the referentiality of the poem? The «world» or frame of reference that emerges from the interaction of narrator and narratee in this Wordsworthian lyric is recognized as known or familiar, and yet as strange or alien. The voice that is «so thrilling» is compared with the voice or song of two birds, the nightingale and the cuckoo, both of which would have immediately established common or shared points of reference for the narrator and the narratee, but the poetic elaboration or framing given to these birds, i. e., their unusual locales, «Arabian sands» and «the farthest Hebrides», constitute a kind of distancing of the poet-narrator from the narratee, as this other frame of reference, the exotic and distant («Arabian sands») and the distant («Hebrides») compel the narratee to accept what Marion B. Ross would perhaps describe as the narrator's «priority». In his discussion of Wordsworth's poem, «To a Highland Girl», in «Naturalizing Gender: Woman's Place in Wordsworth's Ideological Landscape», Ross contends that, «Wordsworth is incapable of conceptualizing any kind of relationship to the girl except that which affirms his own priority... he would not be willing to be her son or her younger brother. This would threaten his priority, his claim to self-determination.» These comments are equally applicable to «The Solitary Reaper». Just as the choice of less familiar locales points to the narrator's knowledge and priority here, too, it also serves to make an implicit claim for the authority of the narrator. If Wordsworth's solitary reaper is

the typical Romantic object of male desire, ostensibly captured and re-presented through the poet's imagination, then it is no less true that both her presence and absence in the poem are marred by a peculiar nostalgia. This is a nostalgia not for who the woman actually was, but, rather, more for the rich associations her symbolic presence and suggested experiential realm occasion. This is a realm of largely vague (for the male poet) female experiences and feelings about which the poet makes implicit claims of knowledge and appreciation. Such implicit factual knowledge of her and appreciation of her song are formal elements in the structural ideology of the poem that serve to privilege his discourse of insight and authority. One of the elements that makes the description of her song so imaginatively appealing to the poet-narrator is the suggestion that its theme may be «old, unhappy, far-off things». Such music may be melancholy or sad, but the fact that it may be imagined to concern the past and half-forgotten matters gives them a distance that attenuates that possible unhappiness communicated in her song. The immediacy of pain is both deflected and diminished in the totality of the staging, of the substance of the song as distanced in time («old») and space («far-off»), while yet familiar and recognizable as «unhappy» or sad. The contradiction of this aesthetic culture is that the very nature of melody or song that is sad or «plaintive» often produces a pleasurable experience or response in the auditor.

How do we begin to account for the intense delight that the poet-narrator derives from the solitary reaper's song, a song about which the only thing we know for certain is that it is sad? Because the experience of pain or sorrow is a universal one, and yet an experience unique to each individual's own sensitivity and understanding of that suffering, the note of sadness *recognized as such* point to the real existence of a «music of humanity», to quote Wordsworth's «Tintern Abbey». This is a music constituted by the symphony of existence, and this is also a music whose more melancholy strains remind us of our own uniqueness as, ultimately, *isolated* in the actual experience of joy and pain who are, paradoxically, *related* more through our isolation, our individuality, than we are through the actual content, of those sorrows and joys. It is the reminder of our own personal histories called forth by the sad song, the bittersweet recognition of separation *and* relatedness, that constitutes the complex character of our aesthetic response to this music. The suggestion then of a woman's melan-

choly song could then be said to activate both individual and collective-cultural memory. What ultimately contributes to the sense that something is not entirely satisfactory in this poem, in spite of its numerous musical and linguistic felicities, is Wordsworth's rejection here of a concern to confront the individual history that may be the source of that song. The 1805 *Prelude* is contemporaneous with «The Solitary Reaper» and Wordsworth is nothing if not exhaustive in personal and historical detail when the subject is *his* song. I wish to underline the «restricted» feminine economy of the solitary reaper: she works and sings. We know then *what* she does, but we do not know *who* she is. It is no wonder then that the poet-narrator cannot translate or understand the music or principle of harmony that the woman represents: «Will no one tell me what she sings?» In this poem the only real action that occurs or is inferred is that of the female: the male «character» represents the passive and meditative and does nothing in the poem. In Doris Dörner's celebrated movie, *Männer*, she has the male protagonist assert, «Ein Mann ist was er tut. Eine Frau was sie ist.» (A man is what he does; a woman is what she is). While such an assertion might be said to be characteristic of a male dominated society this is just the opposite of what we find in «The Solitary Reaper», in which the woman is defined by action («reaping and singing» and «she cuts and binds the grain») and the poet-narrator by being an artist. If the poem itself is that activity (what he does) that helps to define the Romantic poet, then that activity becomes suspect, since the poet as «exceptional man» or Romantic hero (at least in his own eyes), emerges as such in this poem only in relation to those passive «virtues» that have been attributed to women. In his letter of February 19, 1818 to John Hamilton Reynolds Keats counselled a wise passiveness: «Now it is more noble to sit like Jove than to fly like Mercury - let us not therefore go hurrying about and collecting honey, bee-like buzzing here and there impatiently from a knowledge of what is to be arrived at: but let us open our leaves like a flower and be passive and receptive - budding patiently under the eye of Apollo.» It should be noted that in this letter the passiveness ordinarily associated with women is now linked to Jove, or Jupiter, a figure of patriarchal authority, and in the process of appropriating what had been traditionally associated with the feminine, passiveness becomes a desirable, admirable and now judiciously masculine characteristic. Such critics as Mary Ja-

cobus, Alan Richardson, and Diane Hoeveler, among others, have noted this need of the Romantic poet to appropriate, absorb, colonize, or cannibalize those qualities traditionally aligned or culturally associated with the feminine. Hoeveler explains this literary practice in terms of Romantic culture:

All the Romantic poets to a large extent explored in their poetry one of their culture's dominant ideological fantasies — that artistic power and creativity were possible for men only if they unified their masculine and feminine components. For male poets, then, female characters had to be either projections and/or symbolic extensions of the masculine psyche.

Paradoxically enough, it is in this process of projection that the Romantic poet preserves that symbolic space between himself as the «imperial» subject and the woman as natural object. In the poet-narrator's turning from the woman to her song we witness an attempt by the Romantic poet to achieve transcendence in the poem, transcendence of the woman. This transcendence is predicated upon the textual removal or distancing of the solitary reaper so that the bond between the male subject and the *logos* will seem to be transparent («natural» and «spontaneous» in Romantic parlance) and unmediated, which is to say, not dependent upon the agency or presence of the Other. In such a process it would seem to be more efficient and effective to simply kill off the woman in the text, as in the Lucy poems, rather than to marginalize her, as in «The Solitary Reaper». The death of Lucy in Wordsworth's poetry reenacts, as J. Hillis Miller has observed, the death of Wordsworth's own mother, but those frequent deaths in Romantic art also reenact in general the symbolic death of the maternal who, as Margaret Homans asserts, is seen as the impediment to the male's accession to the symbolic, to the language and prerogatives of his literary. To clear the poetic landscape of her presence, which occasioned the poem, can clearly be seen as the expression of the poet's wish to also clear the aesthetic landscape of her trace, those hints or intimations of mortality that call into doubt the actual ability of the strong poet to, in god-like fashion, create a self. In «The Solitary Reaper» such a fatal choice, the death of the young woman, would be superfluous for two important reasons: 1) the maiden is already, to paraphrase August Graf von Platen's «Tristan,» given over as a hostage to death, is already subtly and intimately associated with death and diminishment since she, while not obviously «grim», is nevertheless the reaper, or symbol of death, and her reaping or harvesting that

occurs in the fall, after the grain has reached its maturity, is accomplished with the aid of a «sickle» (whose presence communicates phallic danger to the male observers); 2) by the end of the poem that song that enraptures or enthralls is no longer *there* or real, having died or faded away to the point of leaving only its impression or trace upon the narrator, a trace that is simultaneously *confirmed* by the new song which is his poem and yet *denied* by her absence when, at the end of the poem, he claims to have captured her «music». As Wallace Stevens asserts in his poem, «Credences of Summer», «it was difficult to sing in face/ Of the object. The singers had to avert themselves/ Or else avert the object». Wordsworth does not and cannot «sing in face/ Of the object», and so he averts the object. The secretive character of his appropriation or cannibalization of her song while he is distancing himself from her («I listened motionless and still... as I mounted up the hill») indicates that there is no real human bond established between the poet-narrator and the «Highland Lass», and, consequently, there could be no real sense of loss from staging her demise.

It is well known that Wordsworth's poem was partially based upon personal experience, but primarily inspired by a passage in Thomas Wilkinson's manuscript that later became the book, *Tour of Scotland*. The detachment between poet-narrator and the woman who is initially presented as the center of his poetic discourse is brought into focus by this biographical information, but the biographical in no way explains the detachment, since for the Romantic poet the region or world created by the imagination was more intense and more «real» than physical reality, and thus we might well expect an intense personal investment in the female character in the imagined Scottish countryside. The psychic investment does occur in this poem, but this investment of sympathy and concern is made on behalf of the character who is the poet-narrator. If the woman has no particular or concrete identity in the poem she does, nevertheless, hold a particular interest for the poet *qua* poet, in that she represents as natural singer or artist a harmony and fusion that is the unspoken ideal of the poem itself, i.e., the dream of radical unity: the solitary reaper in her «reaping and singing» achieves a simultaneity of practical industry or profit and art. Reaping implies that ripeness or maturity has been reached, that there is an identifiable return upon previous effort, a return that is in addition to the art product, her song. Within early nineteenth cen-

ture industrial capitalism the agrarian worker, the solitary reaper, is, in the poem, implicitly compared to the Romantic poet and she emerges in this modern context as a formidable model who produces not only art that nourishes the soul (Her song sustains and supports his art «long after it was heard no more»), but she also harvests and collects the «grain» that nourishes the body. Within such an economy and society the female laborer who can simultaneously contribute to that economy and to art is an intimidating and imposing figure. Helen Haworth has shown that nineteenth century bourgeois society (from which most Romantic artists came) saw traditional masculine and feminine roles

codified into public provider (male) and domestic «angel in the house» (female). The laboring, lower class reaper is not so limited. It is not merely that deep down in the poet's subconscious this woman is a threatening figure because her art is obviously more spontaneous and natural than his own song or poem, but perhaps what disturbs the poet most may be the fact that she, the less than privileged, achieves art and industry at one and the same time, so that the temporal, the moment of song and physical labor, becomes also the place, the unalienated space where an ideal unity and harmony are attained.

Флемінг Р.

«САМОТНЯ ЖНИЦЯ» ВОРДСВОРТА: ГЕНДЕРНИЙ АСПЕКТ ТА ІДЕОЛОГІЧНА СТРУКТУРА ЛІРИКИ РОМАНТИЗМУ

Об'єктом аналізу у статті є твір поета ХІХ ст. Вільяма Вордсворта «Самотня жниця» («The Solitary Reaper»), один із прикладів літератури романтизму. Дослідник окреслює характерні риси того, як наратор-романтичний ліричний герой - осмислює оточення, уособлене в образній картині вірша, а також: своє місце в ньому. Особливу увагу приділено образам навколишнього природного середовища як чинникам формування характеру ліричного героя.