What happens?

A resting speaker enjoys a grove but repeatedly returns to sadness about human conduct.

The main idea

Nature’s apparent harmony prompts a repeated question about the harm humans do to one another.

1. “I heard a thousand blended notes,”

Method: Auditory imagery

Different sounds combine without losing their individual existence.

2. “And much it grieved my heart to think”

Method: Emotional verb

Enjoyment and moral pain exist at the same time.

3. “Their thoughts I cannot measure:—”

Method: Admission of limitation

The speaker does not claim complete access to the birds’ experience.

4. “What man has made of man?”

Method: Repeated question

Human suffering is presented as something humanity itself has produced.

Form and structure

Six quatrains with alternating rhyme; the shorter fourth lines repeatedly bring reflection to a point.

Development, voice and tone

Resting and listening — Peaceful, then troubled. Pleasant surroundings do not prevent sad thoughts from entering the speaker’s mind.

Flowers, birds and branches — Wondering. Small movements are interpreted as signs of pleasure, though the speaker admits limits to knowledge.

Returning question — Lamenting. The poem finishes by testing human conduct against the speaker’s belief in natural harmony.

Context

Published in Lyrical Ballads in 1798, the poem connects Romantic attention to nature with an ethical question about humanity.

Comparison links

Shall earth no more inspire thee: different appeals to nature’s restorative power. Like an Heiress: pleasure disrupted by human damage.

Recall question

Why does the question about humanity return?