

The Tables Turned (1798) by William Wordsworth

Up! up! my Friend, and quit your books;
Or surely you'll grow double:
Up! up! my Friend, and clear your looks;
Why all this toil and trouble?

The sun above the mountain's head,
A freshening lustre mellow
Through all the long green fields has spread,
His first sweet evening yellow.

Books! 'tis a dull and endless strife:
Come, hear the woodland linnet,
How sweet his music! on my life,
There's more of wisdom in it.

And hark! how blithe the throstle sings!
He, too, is no mean preacher:
Come forth into the light of things,
Let Nature be your teacher.

She has a world of ready wealth,
Our minds and hearts to bless—
Spontaneous wisdom breathed by health,
Truth breathed by cheerfulness.

One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can.

Sweet is the lore which Nature brings;
Our meddling intellect
Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things:—
We murder to dissect.

Enough of Science and of Art;
Close up those barren leaves;
Come forth, and bring with you a heart
That watches and receives.

Source: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45557/the-tables-turned>

Introduction

“The Tables Turned” is a poem written by William Wordsworth in 1798 and published in his *Lyrical Ballads*. It is a **short lyric** poem of **thirty-two lines** arranged in **8 stanzas**. Each stanza is a **quatrain** that rhymes **abab**.

Summary

Stanza 1

Up! up! my toil and trouble? The speaker advises the reader, whom he addresses as his "friend" in the opening line, to put the books down since they weigh one down and make one feel heavy. He urges readers to embrace positivity and allow go of all their "trouble."

Stanza 2

The sun, above sweet evening yellow. The sun is mentioned explicitly in this stanza's lovely description of nature. From the top of the mountain, the protagonist explains how lovely the sunset is as it spreads across the lush fields.

Stanza 3

Books! 't is a dull more of wisdom in it. This stanza immediately follows it. The poet describes books as "boring" in contrast to the beauty of nature. He again encourages the reader to let go of them and listen to the melody of a bird called a linnet since, in his opinion, it contains far more knowledge than books.

Stanza 4

And hark! how be your teacher. The previous stanza's feelings are continued in the following stanza. The bird song does not contain "mean" preaching like that found in books. He advises the readers to learn from nature since it is a lot better instructor as an impact.

Stanza 5

She has a world breathed by cheerfulness. "She," or nature, has a rich world to offer, and the reader, or humans, are the beneficiaries. After all, truth and wisdom may be learned through nature and her joy.

Stanza 6

One impulse from all the sages can. Another emphasis depends on the notion that nature is a teacher. The character asserts that a forest is a better place to learn morality and ethics than sages, who have the most excellent depth of knowledge.

Stanza 7

Sweet is the lore which We murder to dissect. According to the persona, we destroy nature's beauty while chasing academic intelligence, which destroys the precious treasures of nature.

Stanza 8

Enough of science watches and receives. In the last stanza, the speaker takes a dominating tone, telling those listening to give up on the arts and sciences since all they will find in books and pages are "barren leaves." He intends to encourage the reader to interact with nature with an open mind and a willingness to see, hear, and acquire knowledge from it.

Themes:

Nature Is the Best Teacher

The speaker implores his friend—in fact, the reader may be the friend he speaks to—to put down her books and come outside, because there is "more of wisdom" in the songs of the birds outside than there is in any book. The speaker personifies the birds and even the sun, as if to convey the idea that everything in nature is purposeful and wise; the bird is not a "mean" preacher but a wise one, and the sun freshens the fields with "His first sweet evening yellow." Nature stands with her "ready wealth" to bless their hearts and minds, breathing truth with a cheerfulness not to be found elsewhere. Nature is the best teacher, far better than other people, and far better than books.

Intellect versus Experience

The speaker claims that "We murder to dissect" the things that we try to understand. In order to take them apart, we must first kill them—either literally or figuratively. This is what happens, the speaker says, when people study and read about something for too long, going over and over the material, trying to understand it fully: they end up "killing" the subject that they seek to understand. Rather than study the "barren leaves" of books that only contain dead things, it is best to go outside and experience the living natural world.

Literary Devices

- Alliteration: Used throughout this poem, alliteration is used to create a more seamless read, as well as connecting words together through sound. This happens in sentences such as “Why all this toil and trouble?” which uses the repetition of the sound “t” to emphasize the negative definition both words incur.
- Personification: Nature is a “she” in this poem, as it is within many literary ideals. The ‘she’ is in reference to mother nature. Giving nature the pronoun “she” allows for a more literal meaning when Wordsworth assigns the role of teacher to nature herself.
- Metaphor: Accompanying personification, there are many instances of metaphor within this poem. Lines such as “One impulse from a vernal wood” and “The sun above the mountain’s head” both indicate metaphors used to bring nature more to life. This furthers Wordsworth’s cause of attempting to persuade the reader that books or boring.

Question: What are the characteristics of Romantic poetry in Wordsworth's poem, “The Table Turned”?

Answer:

In "The Tables Turned," Wordsworth's poem exhibits Romantic characteristics by advocating for emotional connection and individuality over formalized study. It emphasizes the value of the natural world, urging readers to let "Nature be your teacher." The poem critiques scientific dissection as "murder" and condemns Math and Science for trying to explain the unexplainable beauty of the world, reflecting key Romantic ideals.

Reference

Guggenheim, Laura. "The Tables Turned - Intellect versus Experience." *eNotes*

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<https://www.enotes.com/topics/tables-turned/themes#themes-intellect-versus-experience>