**POETRY OF WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT  
(The blank boxes are for paraphrases, dialectical commentary, literary analysis, and connections.)**  
**An Early Sonnet - “MUTATION”**

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| THEY talk of short-lived pleasure--be it so-- Pain dies as quickly: stern, hard-featured pain Expires, and lets her weary prisoner go. The fiercest agonies have shortest reign; And after dreams of horror, comes again The welcome morning with its rays of peace. Oblivion, softly wiping out the stain, Makes the strong secret pangs of shame to cease. Remorse is virtue's root; its fair increase Are fruits of innocence and blessedness: Thus joy, o'erborne and bound, doth still release His young limbs from the chains that round him press. Weep not that the world changes--did it keep A stable changeless state, 'twere cause indeed to weep. |  |

## A Statement of Bryant’s Philosophy - “TO A WATERFOWL”

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| [Whither,](javascript:void(0);) 'midst falling dew,  While glow the heavens with the last [steps of day](javascript:void(0);),  Far, through their rosy depths, dost [thou](javascript:void(0);) pursue        Thy solitary way? |  |
| Vainly the [fowler's eye](javascript:void(0);)  Might mark thy distant flight to do thee wrong,  As, darkly painted on the [crimson sky,](javascript:void(0);)        Thy figure floats along. |  |
| Seek'st thou the [plashy](javascript:void(0);) brink Of weedy lake, or [marge](javascript:void(0);) of river wide,  Or where the rocking [billows](javascript:void(0);) rise and sink        On the [chafed](javascript:void(0);) ocean side? |  |
| There is a [Power](javascript:void(0);) whose care Teaches thy way along that pathless coast,--  The desert and illimitable air,--         Lone wandering, but not lost. |  |
| All day thy wings have fann'd  At that far height, the cold thin atmosphere:  Yet stoop not, weary, to the [welcome land](javascript:void(0);),       Though the dark night is near. |  |
| And soon that toil shall end,  Soon shalt thou find a summer home, and rest,  And scream among thy fellows; reeds shall bend        Soon o'er thy [sheltered](javascript:void(0);) nest. |  |
| Thou'rt gone, the [abyss of heaven](javascript:void(0);)  Hath swallowed up thy form; yet, on my heart  Deeply hath sunk [the lesson thou hast given,](javascript:void(0);)        And shall not soon depart. |  |
| [He,](javascript:void(0);) who, from zone to zone,  Guides through the boundless sky thy certain flight,  In the long way that I must tread [alone,](javascript:void(0);)        Will lead my steps aright. |  |

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| Small, crafty, cowering, timorous little beast, O, what a panic is in your little breast! You need not start away so hasty With argumentative chatter! I would be loath to run and chase you, With murdering plough-staff.  I'm truly sorry man's dominion Has broken Nature's social union, And justifies that ill opinion Which makes you startle At me, your poor, earth born companion And fellow mortal!  Your small house, too, in ruin! Its feeble walls the winds are scattering! And nothing now, to build a new one, Of coarse grass green! And bleak December's winds coming, Both bitter and keen!  You saw the fields laid bare and wasted, And weary winter coming fast, And cozy here, beneath the blast, You thought to dwell, Till crash! the cruel plough passed Out through your cell. | That small bit heap of leaves and stubble, Has cost you many a weary nibble! Now you are turned out, for all your trouble, Without house or holding, To endure the winter's sleety dribble, And hoar-frost cold.  But little Mouse, you are not alone, In proving foresight may be vain: The best laid schemes of mice and men Go often awry, And leave us nothing but grief and pain, For promised joy!  Still you are blest, compared with me! The present only touches you: But oh! I backward cast my eye, On prospects dreary! And forward, though I cannot see, I guess and fear!  I doubt not, sometimes, but you may steal; What then? Poor little beast, you must live! An odd ear in twenty-four sheaves Is a small request; I will get a blessing with what is left, And never miss it. |

## Comparison: Scottish Poet Robert Burns’s “To a Mouse Bryant’s Masterpiece - “THANATOPSIS”

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| |  |  | | --- | --- | | TO HIM who in the love of Nature holds |  | | Communion with her visible forms, she speaks |  | | A various language; for his gayer hours |  | | She has a voice of gladness, and a smile |  | | And eloquence of beauty, and she glides | *5* | | Into his darker musings, with a mild |  | | And healing sympathy, that steals away |  | | Their sharpness, ere he is aware. When thoughts |  | | Of the last bitter hour come like a blight |  | | Over thy spirit, and sad images | *10* | | Of the stern agony, and shroud, and pall, |  | | And breathless darkness, and the narrow house, |  | | Make thee to shudder, and grow sick at heart;— |  | | Go forth under the open sky, and list |  | | To Nature's teachings, while from all around— | *15* | | Earth and her waters, and the depths of air— |  | | Comes a still voice—Yet a few days, and thee |  | | The all-beholding sun shall see no more |  | | In all his course; nor yet in the cold ground, |  | | Where thy pale form was laid, with many tears, | *20* | | Nor in the embrace of ocean, shall exist |  | | Thy image. Earth, that nourished thee, shall claim |  | | Thy growth, to be resolved to earth again, |  | | And, lost each human trace, surrendering up |  | | Thine individual being, shalt thou go | *25* | | To mix forever with the elements; |  | | To be a brother to the insensible rock, |  | | And to the sluggish clod, which the rude swain |  | | Turns with his share, and treads upon. The oak |  | | Shall send his roots abroad, and pierce thy mould. | *30* | |  |
| |  |  | | --- | --- | | Yet not to thine eternal resting-place |  | | Shalt thou retire alone, nor couldst thou wish |  | | Couch more magnificent. Thou shalt lie down |  | | With patriarchs of the infant world,—with kings, |  | | The powerful of the earth,—the wise, the good, | *35* | | Fair forms, and hoary seers of ages past, |  | | All in one mighty sepulchre. The hills |  | | Rock-ribbed and ancient as the sun; the vales |  | | Stretching in pensive quietness between; |  | | The venerable woods—rivers that move | *40* | | In majesty, and the complaining brooks |  | | That make the meadows green; and, poured round all, |  | | Old Ocean's gray and melancholy waste,— |  | | Are but the solemn decorations all |  | | Of the great tomb of man! The golden sun, | *45* | | The planets, all the infinite host of heaven, |  | | Are shining on the sad abodes of death, |  | | Through the still lapse of ages. All that tread |  | | The globe are but a handful to the tribes |  | | That slumber in its bosom.—Take the wings | *50* | | Of morning, pierce the Barcan wilderness, |  | | Or lose thyself in the continuous woods |  | | Where rolls the Oregon, and hears no sound, |  | | Save his own dashings,—yet the dead are there: |  | | And millions in those solitudes, since first | *55* | | The flight of years began, have laid them down |  | | In their last sleep—the dead reign there alone. |  | | So shalt thou rest; and what if thou withdraw |  | | In silence from the living, and no friend |  | | Take note of thy departure? All that breathe | *60* | | Will share thy destiny. The gay will laugh |  | | When thou art gone, the solemn brood of care |  | | Plod on, and each one as before will chase |  | | His favorite phantom; yet all these shall leave |  | | Their mirth and their employments, and shall come | *65* | | And make their bed with thee. As the long train |  | | Of ages glide away, the sons of men, |  | | The youth in life's green spring, and he who goes |  | | In the full strength of years, matron and maid, |  | | The speechless babe, and the gray-headed man— | *70* | | Shall one by one be gathered to thy side |  | | By those, who in their turn shall follow them. |  | |  | |
| |  |  | | --- | --- | | So live, that when thy summons comes to join |  | | The innumerable caravan which moves |  | | To that mysterious realm, where each shall take | *75* | | His chamber in the silent halls of death, |  | | Thou go not, like the quarry-slave at night, |  | | Scourged to his dungeon, but, sustained and soothed |  | | By an unfaltering trust, approach thy grave |  | | Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch | *80* | | About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams. |  | |  | |

KEY ROMANTIC THEMES OF BRYANT’S POETRY: