

Country Churchyard" [1750]). His reading of Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) influenced his prosody and inspired his own continuing development from a neo-classical to a Romantic poet who discerned moral lessons and a divine presence in the American landscape. Bryant's ever-supportive father sponsored the publication of the early version of "Thanatopsis" in the 1817 *North American Review*; the 1821 version concludes with a fervent injunction to trust in self and nature, thereby anticipating (and perhaps helping to inspire) Emerson's writings of the 1830s and 1840s.

Bryant would have liked to support himself as a poet, but this was impossible at the time, so in 1816 he opened a law partnership; he worked as a lawyer into the mid-1820s. In 1821 he married Frances Fairchild; the couple had two daughters. That same year he was invited to deliver the Phi Beta Kappa poem at Harvard College's commencement. He read a long poem on the progress of liberty, "The Ages," whose favorable reception induced him to publish his *Poems* later that year. Buoyed by the book's success, Bryant embarked on a practical kind of literary career by moving to New York City to edit the *New-York Review and Atheneum Magazine*. Welcomed as a celebrity, he embraced metropolitan life, becoming an early member of James Fenimore Cooper's Bread and Cheese Club and developing a close friendship with Catharine Sedgwick. She dedicated her second novel, *Redwood* (1823), to him and he favorably reviewed it in the April 1825 *North American Review*. Though the *New-York Review* failed, Bryant stayed in New York as an editorial assistant on the *New York Evening Post*. By 1829 he was the newspaper's part owner and editor-in-chief, a position he would keep for nearly fifty years. A Jacksonian Democrat, Bryant championed the rights of labor unions, the virtues of free trade, prison reform, the importance of international copyright protection for authors, and antislavery. His loathing of slavery eventually prompted him to lead the anti-slavery Free-Soil movement within the Democratic Party, and then leave the party altogether. In the mid-1850s he helped form the Republican Party and in 1860 was an influential supporter of Abraham Lincoln.

As he and his newspaper prospered, Bryant traveled widely in the United States and abroad. In 1850 he brought out *Letters of a Traveller*, the first of three collections of his travel writings. He also published more than ten volumes of poetry between 1832 and 1876. His best known public poem was "The Death of Lincoln," which he wrote shortly after the assassination; it was read to thousands gathered at New York City's Union Square the day before Lincoln's body arrived for a viewing. Bryant's wife, Frances, died in 1866, but he held on to his editorship at the *Evening Post*. In his seventies he began the remarkably ambitious project of translating Homer. His blank-verse version of the *Iliad* appeared in 1870 and his *Odyssey* followed in 1872. The 1876 publication of his collected *Poems* crowned his career. Two years later, he died of the consequences of a fall after he gave a speech at the unveiling of a statue of the Italian patriot and revolutionary Giuseppe Mazzini in Central Park. In New York City flags were lowered to half-staff, and Bryant was mourned as a great poet and editor.

Thanatopsis¹

To him who in the love of Nature holds
Communion with her visible forms, she speaks
A various language; for his gayer hours

1. From *Poems* (1821); a shorter version appeared in the September 1817 issue of the *North American Review*.

She has a voice of gladness, and a smile
 And eloquence of beauty, and she glides
 Into his darker musings, with a mild
 And gentle 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
 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 list²
 To Nature's teachings, while from all around—
 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,
 Nor in the embrace of ocean shall exist
 Thy image. Earth, that nourished thee, shall claim
 Thy growth, to be resolv'd to earth again;
 And, lost each human trace, surrend'ring up
 Thine individual being, shalt thou go
 To mix forever with the elements,
 To be a brother to th' insensible rock
 And to the sluggish clod, which the rude swain
 Turns with his share,³ and treads upon. The oak
 Shall send his roots abroad, and pierce thy mould.
 Yet not to thy 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,
 Fair forms, and hoary seers of ages past,
 All in one mighty sepulchre.—The hills
 Rock-ribb'd and ancient as the sun,—the vales
 Stretching in pensive quietness between;
 The venerable woods—rivers that move
 In majesty, and the complaining brooks
 That make the meadows green; and pour'd round all,
 Old ocean's grey and melancholy waste,—
 Are but the solemn decorations all
 Of the great tomb of man. The golden sun,
 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
 Of morning—and the Barcan desert⁴ pierce,

2. Listen.

3. Plowshare. "Swain": farmer.

4. In Barca (northeast Libya).

Or lose thyself in the continuous woods
 Where rolls the Oregon,⁵ 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 shalt fall
 Unnoticed by 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 favourite 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 bow'd with age, the infant in the smiles 70
 And beauty of its innocent age cut off,—
 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, that moves 75
 To the pale realms of shade, where each shall take
 His chamber in the silent halls of death,
 Thou go not, like the quarry-slave at night,
 Scourged to his dungeon, but sustain'd and sooth'd
 By an unfaltering trust, approach thy grave, 80
 Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch
 About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams.

1817

1821

To a Waterfowl¹

Whither, 'midst falling dew,
 While glow the heavens with the last steps of day,
 Far, through their rosy depths, dost thou pursue
 Thy solitary way?

Vainly the fowler's eye
 Might mark thy distant flight to do thee wrong,
 As, darkly painted on the crimson sky,
 Thy figure floats along.

5

5. An early variant spelling of Oregon; now the Columbia River.

1. From *Poems* (1821); an earlier version appeared

in the May 1818 issue of the *North American Review*.

Seek'st thou the plashy² brink
 Of weedy lake, or marge of river wide,
 Or where the rocking billows rise and sink
 On the chafed ocean side? 10

There is a Power whose care
 Teaches thy way along that pathless coast,—
 The desert and illimitable air,—
 Lone wandering, but not lost. 15

All day thy wings have fann'd
 At that far height, the cold thin atmosphere:
 Yet stoop not, weary, to the welcome land,
 Though the dark night is near. 20

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 nest.

Thou'rt gone, the abyss of heaven
 Hath swallowed up thy form; yet, on my heart
 Deeply hath sunk the lesson thou hast given,
 And shall not soon depart. 25

He, who, from zone to zone,
 Guides through the boundless sky thy certain flight,
 In the long way that I must tread alone,
 Will lead my steps aright. 30

1818

1821

Sonnet—To an American Painter Departing for Europe¹

Thine eyes shall see the light of distant skies:
 Yet, Cole!² thy heart shall bear to Europe's strand
 A living image of thy native land,
 Such as on thy own glorious canvass lies.
 Lone lakes—savannahs where the bison roves—
 Rocks rich with summer garlands—solemn streams—
 Skies, where the desert eagle wheels and screams—
 Spring bloom and autumn blaze of boundless groves.
 Fair scenes shall greet thee where thou goest—fair, 5

2. Marshy.

1. The text is that of the first book printing in *Poems* (1832). Bryant drafted the poem in 1829 and eventually retitled it "To Cole, the Painter, Departing for Europe."

2. The Hudson River School painter Thomas Cole (1801–1848) traveled in 1829 to Italy, where

he would remain for three years. (For examples of Cole's art, see the reproductions from his "Course of Empire" [1836] series in the color insert to this volume.) In 1849, the year after Cole's death, Asher B. Durand painted a landscape image of Cole and Bryant in New York's Catskill Mountains.

Thus change the forms of being. Thus arise
 Races of living things, glorious in strength,
 And perish, as the quickening breath of God
 Fills them, or is withdrawn. The red man too—
 Has left the blooming wilds he ranged so long, 90
 And, nearer to the Rocky Mountains, sought
 A wider hunting ground. The beaver builds
 No longer by these streams, but far away,
 On waters whose blue surface ne'er gave back
 The white man's face—among Missouri's springs, 95
 And pools whose issues swell the Oregon,⁵
 He rears his little Venice.⁶ In these plains
 The bison feeds no more. Twice twenty leagues
 Beyond remotest smoke of hunter's camp,
 Roams the majestic brute, in herds that shake 100
 The earth with thundering steps—yet here I meet
 His ancient footprints stamped beside the pool.
 Still this great solitude is quick with life.
 Myriads of insects, gaudy as the flowers
 They flutter over, gentle quadrupeds, 105
 And birds, that scarce have learned the fear of man
 Are here, and sliding reptiles of the ground,
 Startlingly beautiful. The graceful deer
 Bounds to the wood at my approach. The bee,
 A more adventurous colonist than man, 110
 With whom he came across the eastern deep,
 Fills the savannas with his murmurings,
 And hides his sweets, as in the golden age,
 Within the hollow oak. I listen long
 To his domestic hum, and think I hear 115
 The sound of that advancing multitude
 Which soon shall fill these deserts. From the ground
 Comes up the laugh of children, the soft voice
 Of maidens, and the sweet and solemn hymn
 Of Sabbath worshippers. The low of herds 120
 Blends with the rustling of the heavy grain
 Over the dark-brown furrows. All at once
 A fresher wind sweeps by, and breaks my dream,
 And I am in the wilderness alone.

1834

The Death of Lincoln¹

Oh, slow to smite and swift to spare,
 Gentle and merciful and just!

5. The Columbia River.

6. I.e., builds a city in the water.

1. Lincoln was assassinated by John Wilkes Booth on April 15, 1865. This poem first appeared in the April 20, 1865, issue of the *New York Evening*

Post, the source of the text printed here. The Unitarian minister Samuel Osgood read the poem to thousands of mourners at New York City's Cooper Union on the evening of April 24, the day before Lincoln's body arrived for a viewing in New York.

Who, in the fear of God, didst bear
The sword of power, a nation's trust!

In sorrow by thy bier we stand,
Amid the awe that hushes all,
And speak the anguish of a land
That shook with horror at thy fall.

Thy task is done; the bond are free;
We bear thee to an honored grave,
Whose proudest monument shall be
The broken fetters of the slave.

Pure was thy life; its bloody close
Hath placed thee with the sons of light,
Among the noble host of those
Who perished in the cause of Right.²

1865

2. In his famous Cooper Union speech of February 27, 1860, delivered at a campaign event that Bryant had helped to organize, Lincoln declared:

"Let us have faith that right makes might, and in that faith, let us, to the end, dare to do our duty as we understand it."

WILLIAM APRESS

1798–1839

Little is known of William Apress's early life other than what he reports in *A Son of the Forest* (1829), the first extensive autobiography published by a Native American. His grandfather, says Apress, was a white man who married the granddaughter of the Wampanoag leader King Philip, or Metacom, whose death at the hands of the English colonists in 1676 brought an end to King Philip's War. Philip increasingly occupied Apress's thoughts during his lifetime, serving as the subject of his last published work. Apress's father, although of mixed blood, joined the Pequot tribe and married an Indian woman who may have been part African American. Born in 1798 in the rural town of Colrain, Massachusetts, Apress by the late 1820s and early 1830s had emerged as a notable reformist leader, arguing for the rights of Native American peoples while developing pointed critiques of the racism of white America. His speeches were noted in William Lloyd Garrison's widely read abolitionist newspaper, *The Liberator*, and may have had an impact on Frederick Douglass's early writings. More important, Apress, through his defiant and questioning rhetoric, helped to set the terms of cultural debate for Native Americans of his own time and beyond.

In *A Son of the Forest*, Apress details the pains of his early life. When he was three he was taken into the home of his poor, alcoholic maternal grandparents, where he was severely beaten. At four or five, he was sold as an indentured laborer. His first master allowed him to attend school for six years, which constituted his entire for-