

2.1 How Two Poets View History

TO A MOUSE by Robert Burns (1785)

Instructions: The poem *To a Mouse* is by Scottish poet Robert Burns. Burns is still recognized as the national poet of Scotland. He is best known for the New Year's Eve song *Auld Lang Syne*. This poem was written in a Scottish dialect that is difficult for modern readers. Below is Burns' original version and one that is modernized. Try to read the original version first and then answer questions 1-4.

Questions

1. How does the poet describe the mouse?
2. In stanza B, what does the farmer say to the mouse?
3. In your opinion, why did Robert Burns write about an "exchange" between a farmer and a mouse?
4. In this poem, how did Robert Burns use the destruction of the mouse's home by the farmer to comment on the nature of history?

Original	Modernized
(A) WEE, sleekit, cowerin', timorous beastie, O, what a panic's in they breastie! Thou needna start awa sae hasty, Wi' bickering brattle! I wad be laith to rin an' chase thee, Wi' murdering pattle!	(A) Little, sly, cowering, timid beast, Oh, what a panic is in your heart! You need not start away so hasty With bickering prattle! I would be loath to run and chase you, With murdering paddle!
(B) I'm truly sorry man's dominion Has broken nature's social union, An' justifies that ill opinion Which makes thee startle At me, thy poor earth-born companion, An' fellow-mortal!	(B) 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!
(C) Thy wee bit housie, too, in ruin! It's silly wa's the win's are strewin! An' naething, now, to big a new ane, O' foggage green! An' bleak December's winds ensuin, Baith snell an' keen!	(C) Your small house, too, in ruin! Its feeble walls the winds are scattering! And nothing now, to build a new one, Of coarse green foliage! And bleak December's winds coming, Both bitter and piercing!
(D) But, Mousie, thou art no thy lane, In proving foresight may be vain: The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men Gang aft a-gley, An' leae us naught but grief and pain, For promised joy.	(D) But Mouse, you are not alone, In proving foresight may be vain: The best laid schemes of mice and men Go often askew, And leave us nothing but grief and pain, For promised joy!

Ozymandias by Percy Bysshe Shelley (1818)

Instructions: The poem *Ozymandias* is by English poet Percy Bysshe Shelley. It is considered a sonnet because it has fourteen lines and a distinct rhyming pattern. In the poem, Shelley commented on the nature of history and the fate of people, even people who were famous in their own time period. We believe that the title of the poem refers to the Greek name for Egyptian Pharaoh Ramesses II. After you read the poem answer questions 1-4.

Questions

1. How does the narrator learn of the existence of the statue?
2. In what condition is the statue?
3. In line four, what is a “visage”?
4. Why is the statement on the pedestal an example of irony?
4. In this poem, how did Percy Bysshe Shelley use the statue to comment on the nature of history?

I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read,
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed,
And on the pedestal these words appear:
"My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings:
Look upon my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.