

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
 5 And eloquence of beauty, and she glides
 Into his darker musings, with a mild
 And healing sympathy, that steals away
 Their sharpness, ere¹ he is aware. When thoughts
 Of the last bitter hour come like a blight
 10 Over thy spirit, and sad images
 Of the stern agony, and shroud, and pall,²
 And breathless darkness, and the narrow house,³
 Make thee to shudder, and grow sick at heart; –
 Go forth, under the open sky, and list⁴
 15 To Nature's teachings, while from all around –
 Earth and her waters, and the depths of air –
 Comes a still voice⁵ –

Yet a few days, and thee
 The all-beholding sun shall see no more
 In all his course; nor yet in the cold ground,
 20 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 resolved to earth again,
 And, lost each human trace, surrendering up
 25 Thine individual being, shalt thou go
 To mix forever with the elements,
 To be a brother to the insensible rock
 And to the sluggish clod, which the rude swain⁶
 Turns with his share,⁷ and treads upon. The oak
 30 Shall send his roots abroad, and pierce thy mould.

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,
 35 The powerful of the earth – the wise, the good,
 Fair forms, and hoary seers⁸ of ages past,
 All in one mighty sepulchre.⁹ The hills
 Rock-ribbed and ancient as the sun, – the vales
 Stretching in pensive quietness between;
 40 The venerable woods – rivers that move
 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
 45 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
 50 That slumber in its bosom. – Take the wings
 Of morning, pierce the Barcan¹⁰ wilderness,
 Or lose thyself in the continuous woods
 Where rolls the Oregon,¹¹ and hears no sound,
 Save his own dashings – yet the dead are there:
 55 And millions in those solitudes, since first
 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
 60 Take note of thy departure? All that breathe
 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
 65 Their mirth and their employments, and shall come
 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,
 70 The speechless babe, and the gray-headed man –
 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
 75 To that mysterious realm, 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, sustained and soothed
 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.

1. **ere** – before
 2. **pall** – a cloth spread over a coffin
 3. **narrow house** – a grave or tomb
 4. **list** – listen
 5. **voice** – in the next section, the voice of Nature speaks directly to the reader
 6. **rude swain** – a rough country kid
 7. **share** – plowshare, a piece of farming equipment
 8. **hoary seers** – old people who could predict the future
 9. **sepulchre** – a tomb or burial chamber
 10. **Barcan** – an area in north Africa
 11. **Oregon** – another name for the Columbia River in the northwest region of the U.S.
 12. **So...** – the voice of Nature has ended and we return to the narrator's voice in this last section



Thanatopsis & Dust in the Wind

By William Cullen Bryant 1817

By Kansas 1977

Directions: On a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions below. To receive credit, you must write complete, thoughtful sentences.

1. Early in the poem, Nature is an example of personification, as it is given human qualities and characteristics. Does Bryant present Nature as male or female? Why do you suppose Bryant chose this gender?
2. Find and write two lines that present death as sleep.
3. Find and write two lines that present death as a return to the earth.
4. Toward the end of the poem, the narrator suggests that we shouldn't view death as though we are slaves being sent to a dungeon. Instead, what image does he want us to imagine?
5. The title of the poem is rather unusual and, at first, confusing for anyone who hasn't studied Greek. Suppose Bryant had instead called this poem, "A View of Death." Would this title be better or worse? How would it change the reader's experience? Explain your opinion.
6. The poem is written in blank verse, meaning each line is built in iambic pentameter and the poem doesn't rhyme. Iambic pentameter is a fancy way of saying 10 syllables (pentameter) where the emphasis is placed on the 2nd, 4th, 6th, 8th, and 10th syllables. (Ex: To **him** / who **in** / the **love** / of **Nat** / ure **holds**) Go back through the poem and write two single lines that could have more than 10 syllables, depending on how the reader pronounces the line.
7. Is it comforting or creepy to think that the soil you walk on contains the remains of billions of deceased people? Explain your thoughts.
8. In the Kansas song, the lyrics state that "nothing lasts forever but the earth and sky." Find and write text from Bryant's poem that expresses this same idea.
9. Comparing "Thanatopsis" to the "Dust in the Wind" lyrics, which piece is intended to be more comforting to the audience? Defend your answer with at least two concrete pieces of evidence.

I CLOSE MY EYES ONLY FOR A MOMENT,
AND THE MOMENT'S GONE
ALL MY DREAMS PASS BEFORE MY EYES,
A CURIOSITY

DUST IN THE WIND,
ALL THEY ARE IS DUST IN THE WIND

SAME OLD SONG,
JUST A DROP OF WATER IN AN ENDLESS SEA
ALL WE DO CRUMBLES TO THE GROUND,
THOUGH WE REFUSE TO SEE

DUST IN THE WIND,
ALL WE ARE IS DUST IN THE WIND

NOW, DON'T HANG ON,
NOTHING LASTS FOREVER BUT THE EARTH AND SKY
IT SLIPS AWAY,
AND ALL YOUR MONEY WON'T ANOTHER MINUTE BUY

DUST IN THE WIND,
ALL WE ARE IS DUST IN THE WIND
(ALL WE ARE IS DUST IN THE WIND)
DUST IN THE WIND
(EVERYTHING IS DUST IN THE WIND),
EVERYTHING IS DUST IN THE WIND (THE WIND)

- DUST IN THE WIND, KANSAS