

1826

TO A MOSQUITO

William Cullen Bryant

Bryant, William Cullen (1794-1878) - American poet and editor of the New York Evening Post who practiced law before devoting his life to writing. A master of blank verse, Bryant's earliest works are considered his best. To a Mosquito (1826) - A humorous poem. Opening lines: Fair insect! that, with threadlike legs spread out, / And blood-extracting bill and filmy wing,...

TO A MOSQUITO

Fair insect! that, with threadlike legs spread out,
 And blood-extracting bill and filmy wing,
 Dost murmur, as thou slowly sail'st about,
 In pitiless ears full many a plaintive thing,
 And tell how little our large veins should bleed,
 Would we but yield them to thy bitter need.
 Unwillingly, I own, and, what is worse,
 Full angrily, men hearken to thy plaint,
 Thou gettest many a brush, and many a curse,
 For saying thou art gaunt, and starved, and faint:
 Even the old beggar, while he asks for food,
 Would kill thee, hapless stranger, if he could.
 I call thee stranger, for the town, I ween,
 Has not the honor of so proud a birth,
 Thou com'st from Jersey meadows, fresh and green,
 The offspring of the gods, though born on earth;
 For Titan was thy sire, and fair was she,
 The ocean nymph, that nursed thy infancy.
 Beneath the rushes was thy cradle swung,
 And when, at length, thy gauzy wings grew strong,
 Abroad to gentle airs their folds were flung,
 Rose in the sky and bore thee soft along:
 The south wind breathed to waft thee on thy way,
 And danced and shone beneath the billowy bay.
 Calm rose afar the city spires, and thence
 Came the deep murmur of its throng of men,
 And as its grateful odors met thy sense,
 They seemed the perfumes of thy native fen.
 Fair lay its crowded streets, and at the sight
 Thy tiny song grew shriller with delight.
 At length thy pinions fluttered in
 Broadway Ah, there were fairy steps, and white necks kissed
 By wanton airs, and eyes whose killing ray
 Shone through the snowy veils like stars through mist;
 And fresh as morn, on many a cheek and chin,
 Bloomed the bright blood through the transparent skin.
 Sure these were sights to touch an anchorite!
 What! do I hear thy slender voice complain?
 Thou wailest when I talk of beauty's light,
 As if it brought the memory of pain:

Thou art a wayward being- well- come near,
 And pour thy tale of sorrow in my ear.
 What sayest thou- slanderer!- rouge makes thee sick?
 And China bloom at best is sorry food?
 And Rowland's Kalydor, if laid on thick,
 Poisons the thirsty wretch that bores for blood?
 Go! 'twas a just reward that met thy crime
 But shun the sacrilege another time.
 That bloom was made to look at, not to touch;
 To worship, not approach, that radiant white;
 And well might sudden vengeance light on such
 As dared, like thee, most impiously to bite.
 Thou shouldst have gazed at distance and admired,
 Murmured thy adoration, and retired.
 Thou'rt welcome to the town; but why come here
 To bleed a brother poet, gaunt like thee?
 Alas! the little blood I have is dear,
 And thin will be the banquet drawn from me.
 Look round- the pale-eyed sisters in my cell,
 Thy old acquaintance, Song and Famine, dwell.
 Try some plump alderman, and suck the blood
 Enriched by generous wine and costly meat;
 On well-filled skins, sleek as thy native mud,
 Fix thy light pump and press thy freckled feet.
 Go to the men for whom, in ocean's halls,
 The oyster breeds, and the green turtle sprawls.
 There corks are drawn, and the red vintage flows
 To fill the swelling veins for thee, and now
 The ruddy cheek and now the ruddier nose
 Shall tempt thee, as thou flittest round the brow;
 And when the hour of sleep its quiet brings,
 No angry hands shall rise to brush thy wings.

THE END