Thanatopsis

Thanatos (Greek) = Death
Opsis (Greek) = Seeing
Thanatopsis = Looking at death – a way of viewing it

By William Cullen Bryant

PPT by Guidorizzi
Romanticism + Thanatopsis

- Draws moral lessons from nature (popular at the time)
- Bryant – speaking of Nature
- Reverence for Nature is an element of Romanticism
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 Into his darker musings, with a mild And healing sympathy, that steals away Their sharpness, ere he is aware. When thoughts

Who is “she”? Who is speaking?

What type of figurative language is being used?
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 Into his darker musings, with a mild And healing sympathy, that steals away Their sharpness, ere he is aware. When thoughts

Who is “she”?

Nature

5
What type of figurative language is being used?

Personification

Who is speaking?

Narrator/Speaker
Last bitter hour?

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;—images*

Go forth under the open sky, and list

To Nature's teachings, while from all around—

*Earth and her waters, and the depths of air— What is the tone?*

What does the speaker suggest we do when we have these thoughts?

*Blight = Impair, destroy*
Last bitter hour? Final hour of life

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 list
To Nature's teachings, while from all around—
Earth and her waters, and the depths of air—

What do these images refer to?
Death is a sickening thought

What does the speaker suggest we do when we have these thoughts? Go outdoors and listen to Nature’s teachings

Blight = Impair, destroy
Coffin = Cover for dead person and coffin

What is the tone? Sad and somber
Change in narration—who is speaking?

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 resolved to earth again,
And, lost each human trace, surrendering up
Thine individual being, shalt thou go
To mix forever with the elements;

What type of figurative language is being used?

What event is being discussed?

What is nature telling us?
Change in narration—who is speaking?

Nature is speaking

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,  

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And, lost each human trace, surrendering up

Thine individual being, shalt thou go

To mix forever with the elements;

What is nature telling us? In death, the earth reclaims you – mix with the elements

What type of figurative language is being used? Personification

What event is being discussed? When a person is buried in the ground
To mix forever with the elements; Clod of dirt
To be a brother to the insensible rock,
Uneducated country youth
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 mold. 30

What is the section saying?
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 mold. 30

What is the section saying? You will be dead and buried. Trees will grow around you, piercing you with roots (circle of life)

Why is this not pleasant? What’s missing?
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 mold. 30

What is the section saying? You will be dead and buried. Trees will grow around you, piercing you with roots (circle of life)
Why is this not pleasant? What's missing? Heaven – dying without ceremony
What is this suggesting?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tone Shift: ???</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yet not to thine eternal resting-place</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shalt thou retire alone, nor couldst thou wish</td>
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<tr>
<td>Couch more magnificent. Thou shalt lie down</td>
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<td>With patriarchs of the infant world,—with kings,</td>
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<td>The powerful of the earth,—the wise, the good, 35</td>
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<td>Fair forms, and hoary seers of ages past,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All in one mighty sepulcher. The hills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What response does Nature have to those who fear the solitude or the indignity of death?
What is this suggesting?
We are not alone in death

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,
Fair forms, and hoary seers of ages past,
All in one mighty sepulcher. The hills

What response does Nature have to those who fear the solitude or the indignity of death? Nature insists that death puts one in the company of the greatest, wisest, and most powerful humans who have ever lived
This section is describing Nature

All in one mighty sepulcher. The hills
Rock-ribbed 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, 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,

What are the tombs?
This section is describing Nature

All in one mighty sepulcher. The hills
Rock-ribbed and ancient as the sun; the vales
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Old Ocean's gray and melancholy waste,—
Are but the solemn decorations all

Of the great tomb of man! The golden sun,

What are the tombs? Hills, vales, woods, rivers,
brooks, meadows, ocean
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, 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
The flight of years began, have laid them down
In their last sleep—the dead reign there alone.
Of the great tomb of man! The golden sun,
The planets, all the infinite host of heaven,
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**The globe are but a handful to the tribes**

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**45**

What does this mean? All the people who are living are nothing in comparison to those who are dead—more people dead than living

**50**

Where are the dead?

**Everywhere—Barcan, Oregon, etc.**
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
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

What does this mean?
What fear is Nature speaking about? Fear of dying alone and being forgotten

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
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
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What does this mean? Everyone will go about their lives, but will eventually share the same fate

How does Nature comfort the reader?

Everyone will suffer a similar fate
*Nature is still speaking*

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.

What do they all have in common?
*Nature is still speaking*

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.

What do they all have in common?
The young, the middle aged, the old, will die (death is an equal opportunity employer)
Narration shifts back to speaker’s voice

So live, that when thy summons comes to join
The innumerable caravan which moves
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
Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch
About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams.

What is the final thought from the speaker?
Narration shifts back to speaker’s voice

So live, that when thy summons comes to join
The innumerable caravan which moves
To that mysterious realm, where each shall take His chamber in the silent halls of death,
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By an unfaltering trust, approach thy grave
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What is the final thought from the speaker? Death is peaceful; when it is your turn to die and join the others, don’t be afraid, it is a comforting place—become one with it
Lessons

• Earth nourished us and will reclaim us
• Do not go alone – reunited with all that go before us
• Endless cycle (birth – growth – re-birth)
• Death is a natural part of life (theme)