

To A Mouse.
On turning her up in her nest with the plough, November 1785.

Robert Burns was a poet, but that was not what earned him his living. As with most artists of his time, he had to have some means of earning his keep. In Burns' case, he earned most of his money from farming. This is why he is also known as the "Ploughman Bard." It was while he was plowing one of his fields that he disturbed a mouse's nest. His thoughts on what he had done led to his poem "To A Mouse," which contains one of his most often quoted lines. You may recognize it probably from lines 39 and 40.

Burns Original		Standard English Translation
<p>Wee, sleekit, cowrin, tim'rous beastie, O, what a panic's in thy breastie! Thou need na start awa sae hasty Wi bickering brattle! I wad be laith to rin an' chase thee, Wi' murdering pattle.</p>	5	<p>Small, sleek, cowering, timorous beast, O, what a panic is in your breast! You need not start away so hasty With hurrying scamper! I would be loath to run and chase you, With murdering plough-staff.</p>
<p>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!</p>	10	<p>I'm truly sorry man's dominion Has broken Nature's social union, And justifies that ill opinion Which makes thee startle At me, thy poor, earth born companion And fellow mortal!</p>
<p>I doubt na, whyles, but thou may thieve; What then? poor beastie, thou maun live! A daimen icker in a thrave 'S a sma' request; I'll get a blessin wi' the lave, An' never miss't.</p>	15	<p>I doubt not, sometimes, but you may steal; What then? Poor beast, you must live! An odd ear in twenty-four sheaves Is a small request; I will get a blessing with what is left, And never miss it.</p>
<p>Thy wee-bit housie, too, in ruin! Its silly wa's the win's are strewin! An' naething, now, to big a new ane, O' foggage green! An' bleak December's win's ensuin, Baith snell an' keen!</p>	20	<p>Your small house, too, in ruin! Its feeble walls the winds are scattering! And nothing now, to build a new one, Of coarse grass green! And bleak December's winds coming, Both bitter and keen!</p>
<p>Thou saw the fields laid bare an' waste, An' weary winter comin fast, An' cozie here, beneath the blast, Thou thought to dwell, Till crash! the cruel coulter past Out thro' thy cell.</p>	25 30	<p>You saw the fields laid bare and wasted, And weary winter coming fast, And cozy here, beneath the blast, You thought to dwell, Till crash! the cruel plough passed Out through your cell.</p>
<p>That wee bit heap o' leaves an' stibble, Has cost thee monie a weary nibble! Now thou's turned out, for a' thy trouble, But house or hald, To thole the winter's sleety dribble, An' cranreuch cauld.</p>	35	<p>That small bit heap of leaves and stubble, Has cost you many a weary nibble! Now you are turned out, for all your trouble, Without house or holding, To endure the winter's sleety dribble, And hoar-frost cold.</p>

<p>But Mousie, thou art no thy lane, In proving foresight may be vain: The best laid schemes o' mice an' men Gang aft agley, An' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain, For promis'd joy!</p>	40	<p>But Mouse, you are not alone, In proving foresight may be vain: The best laid schemes of mice and men Go often askew, And leaves us nothing but grief and pain, For promised joy!</p>
<p>Still thou are blest, compared wi' me! The present only toucheth thee: But och! I backward cast my e'e, On prospects drear! An' forward, tho' I canna see, I guess an' fear!</p>	45	<p>Still you are blest, compared with me! The present only touches you: But oh! I backward cast my eye, On prospects dreary! And forward, though I cannot see, I guess and fear!</p>

- 1) What is the speaker's attitude toward the mouse? Does he view the mouse in the way you would expect a farmer to do so, or is his view of the mouse surprising at all? Why?
- 2) John Steinbeck chose his novel's title as an allusion (or reference) to this poem. Why do you think Steinbeck did so—for one reason, or for multiple reasons?