

Nate Warren

Robert Burns Society Literary Essay

Garden School, Jackson Heights

May 2022

### Fate in "To a Mouse" by Robert Burns

Have you ever caused harm but did not intend to do so? Who are the vulnerable and the powerful in our society? Is it global leaders, the wealthy, religious leaders? The poem "To a Mouse" by Robert Burns is a perfect answer to these questions. In this poem, Burns depicts a scene of vulnerability and power in poetry. "The Mouse" in this poem represents the vulnerable, and Burns plays the role of the powerful.

Throughout the poem, Burns describes how he feels remorse for a mouse after destroying the animal's home with his plow. He apologizes to the Mouse for his mistake and the destruction caused by humanity. Burns also reflects on the role of vulnerability in the life of every creature.

Burns expresses his remorse for the Mouse and nature in the second stanza. He does this by saying, "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!".

Expressing remorse, the stanza illustrates the speaker's reflection on an act that perhaps any other plowman would disregard. Burns is explaining how humans have caused irreversible damage to nature. Moreover, the Mouse's reaction is justified and is a message to humanity. Burns referred to himself as a fellow mortal even though he is dominant compared to the Mouse; Burns seems to be just as vulnerable.

Burns continues about how since the Mouse's house is destroyed, and he will suffer through the winter. Burns then elaborates on the link between mice and humans. He says, "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!". Burns goes on to say, "Still, thou art blest, compar'd wi' me! The present only toucheth thee: / But Och! I backward cast my eye, On prospects drear! / An' forward tho' I canna see I guess an' fear!" Burns is comparing human life to the life of the Mouse. He believes that since fate is the deciding factor in everybody's life, making plans pointless and impossible to perfect.

Moreover, Burns goes on about how the Mouse has it better than a human. He believes this because danger for mice is

momentary while human struggles are different. Humans deal with the mental battle of fate throughout their whole life. Humans try to plan for disaster but are never truly prepared. Fate will always play a decisive role in society because nobody can control or successfully plan for it.

The theme of power and vulnerability is apparent throughout the poem. This poem perfectly depicts the power struggle. People fight for power to escape vulnerability, but in "To a Mouse," Burns feels vulnerable even though he has power over the Mouse. Burns knows that even though he is more potent than the mouse, fate has the final say in their futures. This applies to current events. The world goes through multiple conflicts for power. People fight for power because it makes them feel secure, but fate is still in the driver seat regardless of the power they have.