



DELPHI
CLASSICS

William Cullen Bryant
Complete Works

DELPHI POETS SERIES

D E L P H I P O E T S S E R I E S

William Cullen Bryant

(1794-1878)



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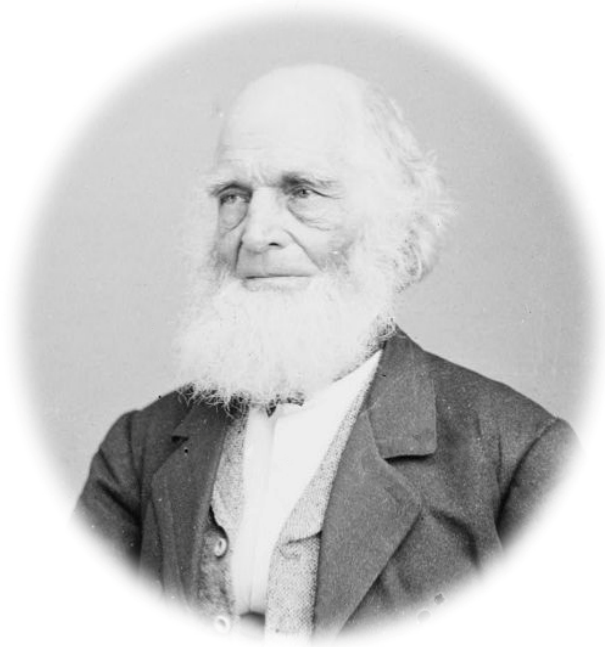
A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "William Cullen Bryant". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a prominent initial 'W' and a decorative flourish at the end.

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Version 1

DELPHI POETS SERIES

William Cullen Bryant



By Delphi Classics, 2022

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NOTE



When reading poetry on an eReader, it is advisable to use a small font size and landscape mode, which will allow the lines of poetry to display correctly.

The Life and Poetry of William Cullen Bryant



Cummington, Massachusetts, c. 1900 — William Cullen Bryant was born on 3 November 1794 in a log cabin near Cummington.



Bryant as a young man by Henry Inman, 1827

William Cullen Bryant (1911) by George Washington Cable



From '1911 Encyclopædia Britannica', Volume 4

WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT (1794–1878), American poet and journalist, was born at Cummington, a farming village in the Hampshire hills of western Massachusetts, on the 3rd of November 1794. He was the second son of Peter Bryant, a physician and surgeon of no mean scholarship, refined in all his tastes, and a public-spirited citizen. Peter Bryant was the great-grandson of Stephen Bryant, an English Puritan emigrant to Massachusetts Bay about the year 1632. The poet's mother, Sarah Snell, was a descendant of "Mayflower" pilgrims. He was born in the log farmhouse built by his father two years before, at the edge of the pioneer settlement among those boundless forests, the deep stamp of whose beauty and majesty he carried on his own mind and reprinted upon the emotions of others throughout a long life spent mainly amid the activities of his country's growing metropolis. By parentage, by religious and political faith, and by hardness of fortune, the earliest of important American poets was appointed to a life typical of the first century of American national existence, and of the strongest single racial element by which that nation's social order has been moulded and promoted. Rated by the amount of time given to school books and college classes, Bryant's early education was limited. After the village school he received a year of exceptionally good training in Latin under his mother's brother, the Rev. Dr Thomas Snell, of Brookfield, followed by a year of Greek under the Rev. Moses Hallock, of Plainfield, and at sixteen entered the sophomore class of Williams College. Here he was an apt and diligent student through two sessions, and then, owing to the straitness of his father's means, he withdrew without graduating, and studied classics and mathematics for a year, in the vain hope that his father might yet be able to send him to Yale College. But the length of his school and college days would be a very misleading measure of his training. He was endowed by nature with many of those traits which it is often only the final triumph of books and institutional regimen to establish in character, and a double impulse toward scholarship and citizenship showed its ruling influence with a precocity and an ardour which gave every day of systematic schooling many times its ordinary value. It is his own word that, two months after beginning with the Greek alphabet, he had read the New Testament through. On abandoning his hope to enter Yale, the poet turned to and pursued, under private guidance at Worthington and at Bridgewater, the study of law. At twenty-one he was admitted to the bar, opened an office in Plainfield, presently withdrew from there, and at Great Barrington settled for nine years in the attorney's calling, with an aversion for it which he never lost. His first book of verse, *The Embargo, or Sketches of the Times; A Satire by a Youth of thirteen*, had been printed at Boston in 1808.

At the age of twenty-six Bryant married, at Great Barrington, Miss Frances Fairchild, with whom he enjoyed a happy union until her death nearly half a century later. In the year of his marriage he suffered the bereavement of his father's death. In 1825 he ventured to lay aside the practice of law, and removed to New York City to assume a literary editorship. Here for some months his fortunes were precarious, until in the next year he became one of the editors of the *Evening Post*. In the third year following, 1829, he came into undivided editorial control, and became also chief

owner. He enjoyed his occupation, fulfilling its duties with an unflagging devotion to every worthy public interest till he died in 1878, in the month of his choice, as indicated in his beautiful poem entitled "June."

Though Bryant's retiring and contemplative nature could not overpower his warm human sympathies, it yet dominated them to an extent that made him always, even in his journalistic capacity and in the strenuous prose of daily debate, a councillor rather than a leader. It was after the manner of the poet, the seer, that he was a patriot, standing for principles much more than for measures, and, with an exquisite correctness which belonged to every phase of his being, never prevailing by the accommodation of himself to inferiors in foresight, insight or rectitude. His vigorous and stately mind found voice in one of the most admirable models of journalistic style known in America. He was founder of a distinct school of American journalism, characterized by an equal fidelity and temperance, energy and dignity. Though it is as a poet that he most emphatically belongs to history, his verse was the expression of only the gentler motions of his mind; and it gathers influence, if not lustre, when behind it is seen a life intrepid, upright, glad, and ever potent for the nobler choice in all the largest affairs of his time. His renown as a poet antedated the appearance of "American poetry," says his first volume by some four or five years. Richard Henry Stoddard, "may be said to have commenced in 1817 with . . . (Bryant's) 'Thanatopsis' and 'Inscription for the entrance of a "Thanatopsis," which revealed a voice at once as new and as old wood.'" as the wilderness out of which it reverberated, had been written at Cummington in the poet's eighteenth year, and was printed in 1817 in the *North American Review*; the "Inscription" was written in his nineteenth, and in his twenty-first, while a student of law at Bridgewater, he had composed his lines "To a Water-fowl," whose exquisite beauty and exalted faith his own pen rarely, if ever, surpassed. The poet's gift for language made him a frequent translator, and among his works of this sort his rendering of Homer is the most noted and most valuable. But the muse of Bryant, at her very best, is always brief-spoken and an interpreter initially of his own spirit. Much of the charm of his poems lies in the equal purity of their artistic and their moral beauty. On the ethical side they are more than pure, they are — it may be said without derogation — Puritan. He never commences with unloveliness for any loveliness that may be plucked out of it, and rarely or never discovers moral beauty under any sort of mask. As free from effeminacy as from indelicacy, his highest and his deepest emotions are so dominated by a perfect self-restraint that they never rise (or stoop) to transports. There is scarcely a distempered utterance in the whole body of his poetical works, scarcely one passionate exaggeration. He faces life with an invincible courage, an inextinguishable hope and heavenward trust, and the dignity of a benevolent will which no compulsion can break or bend. The billows of his soul are not waves, but hills which tempests ruffle but can never heave. Even when he essays to speak for spirits unlike his own — characters of history or conceptions of his own imagination — he never with signal success portrays them in the bonds, however transient, of any overmastering passion. For merriment he has a generous smile, for sorrow a royal one; but the nearest he ever comes to mirth is in his dainty rhyme, "Robert of Lincoln," and the nearest to a wail in those exquisite notes of grief for the loss of his young sister, "The Death of the Flowers," which only draw the tear to fill it with the light of a perfect resignation. As a seer of large and noble contemplation, in whose pictures of earth and sky the presence and care of the Divine mind, and every tender and beautiful relation of man to his Creator and to his fellow, are melodiously celebrated, his rank is among the master poets of America, of whom he is historically the first.

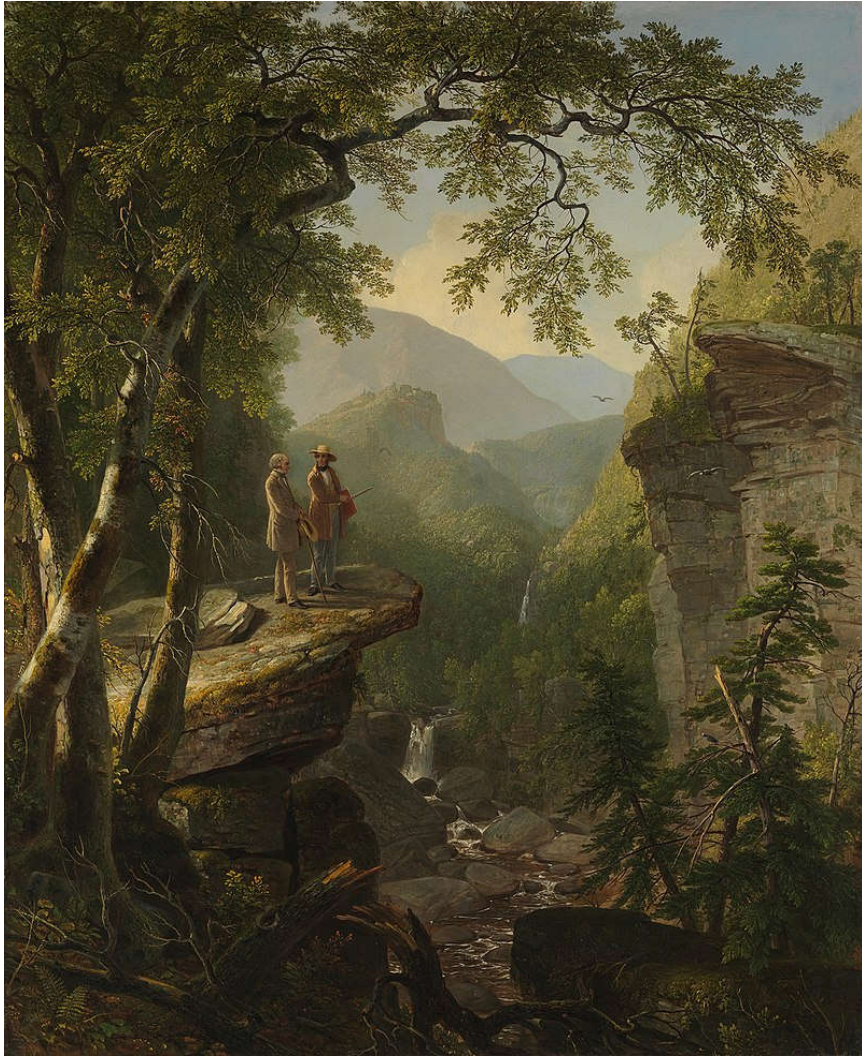
Bryant published volumes of *Poems* in 1821 (Cambridge) and 1832 (New York), and many other collections were issued under his supervision, the last being the *Poetical Works* (New York, 1876). Among his volumes of verse were "The Fountain" and other poems (New York, 1842); *The White-Footed Deer and Other Poems* (New York, 1844); *Thirty Poems* (New York, 1864); and blank-verse translations of *The Iliad of Homer* (Boston, 1870) and of *The Odyssey of Homer* (Boston, 1871). His *Poetical Works* and his *Complete Prose Writings* (New York, 1883 and 1884) were edited by Parke Godwin, who also wrote *A Biography of William Cullen Bryant, with Extracts from his private Correspondence* (New York, 1883). See also J. Grant Wilson, *Bryant and his Friends* (New York, 1886); John Bigelow, *William Cullen Bryant* (Boston, 1890), in the "American Men of Letters" series; W. A. Bradley, *Bryant*, in the "English Men of Letters" series (1905); E. C. Stedman, *Poets of America* (1885); and biographical and bibliographical introductions by Henry C. Sturges and Richard Henry Stoddard to the "Roslyn edition" of his *Poetical Works* (New York, 1903).



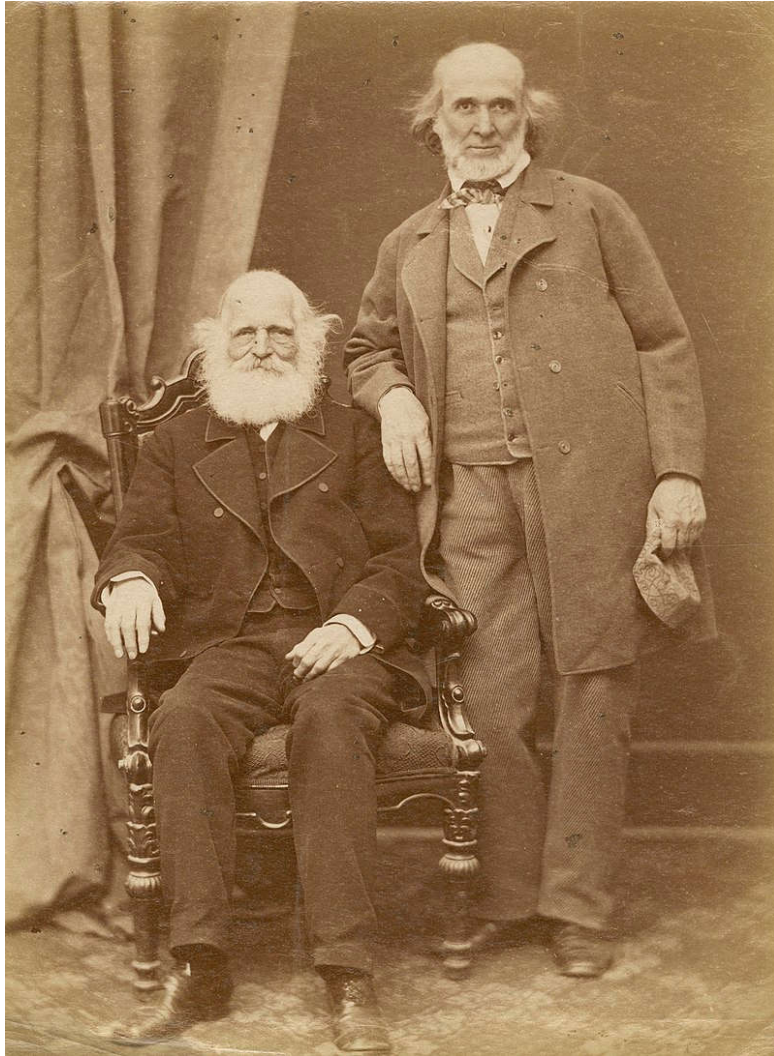
Daguerreotype of Washington Irving, c. 1861 — Irving was a friend and supporter of Bryant, helping him to publish his first poetry collection in Britain.



Engraving of Bryant in middle years, c. 1844



Asher Durand's 1849 'Kindred Spirits' portrays Bryant with Thomas Cole, in this quintessentially Hudson River School work.



Hiram Powers and William Cullen Bryant, 1867, albumen print, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC

POEMS

BY

WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT.

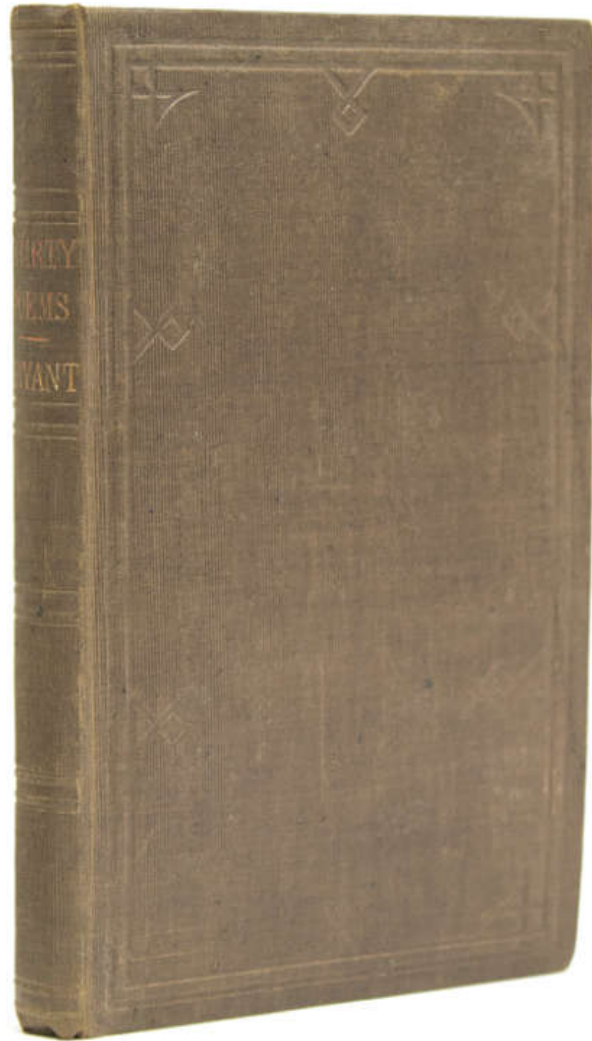
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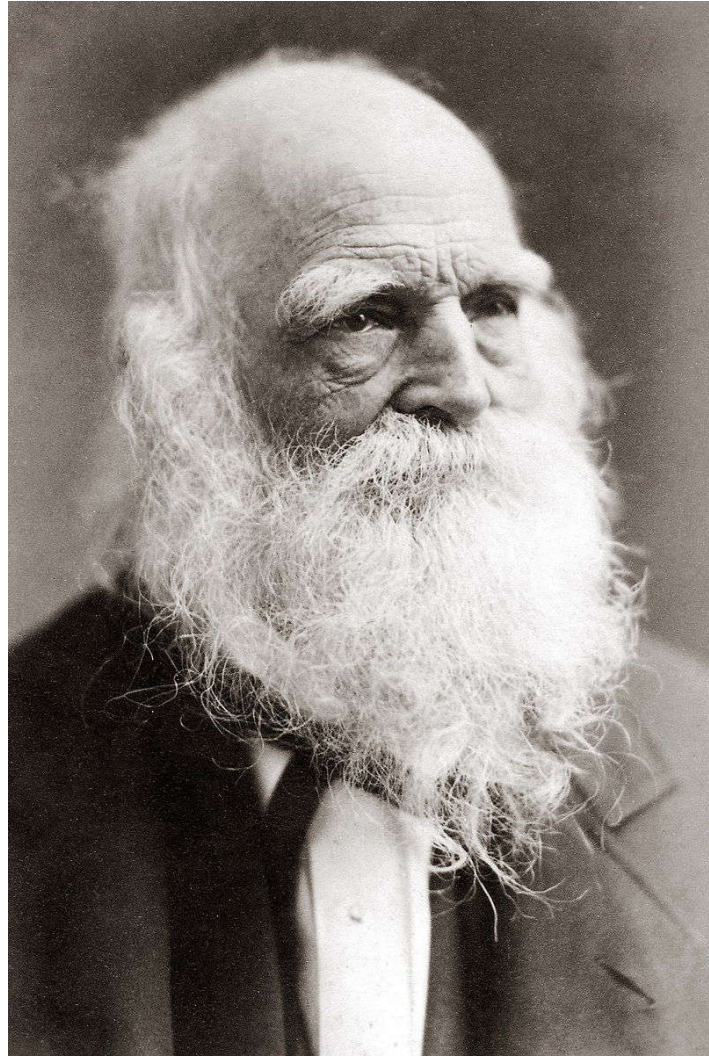
PRINTED BY HILLIARD AND METCALF.

1821.

The first edition title page of Bryant's first poetry collection, 'Poems', 1821



The first edition of the collection 'Thirty Poems', 1864



Bryant in later years, c. 1876

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End of Sample