

Robert Burns: *To A Mouse & To A Louse* (p. 840-845)

To a Mouse:

1. Who are the speaker and the audience, and what is the occasion of the poem?
2. What has happened to the mouse's attempt to prepare for winter?
3. How does the speaker feel about the grain the mouse steals?
4. What does the speaker's reaction show about his ideas of justice?
5. How do ll. 7-8 display a typical **Romantic** concern? For what reason does the speaker apologize to the mouse?
6. According to ll. 19-23, why can't the mouse build another home?
7. How does the speaker's tone change in l. 37? What does the speaker imply in the last stanza about his own past and his prospects for the future?
8. In stanza 2, what do the words *dominion* and *union* mean? What **Romantic** attitude towards people and nature does the use of these words imply?
9. What comparisons between the mouse and himself does the speaker make in the last two stanzas?
10. Which two famous lines in the poem express the poem's theme, (in Scottish dialect) in *epigrammatic* fashion? Restate the theme in your own words.

To a Louse:

1. What is the point of view of the poem? Who is speaker and who is the audience?
2. What is the louse doing? What does the speaker command it to do instead?
3. What social assumptions about cleanliness does the speaker's command reflect?
4. What impression of Jenny does the speaker create? How do the references to her clothing and the contrast between her and "some poor body" contribute to this impression?
5. What does the speaker reveal about himself in ll.1-12?
6. In ll. 37-42, why does the speaker warn Jenny against tossing her head? What is the reaction of others in the church to Jenny's gesture?
7. Why is the contrast between this gesture and the progress of the louse particularly embarrassing?
8. What is the speaker's tone in *To a Louse*? How does it differ from the speaker's tone in *To a Mouse*?
9. Paraphrase the thematic generalization (*epigram*) that the speaker makes in the last stanza.
10. Do you think caring about the impression we make on others is foolish vanity? Explain.