

1844

THE WHITE FOOTED DEER

William Cullen Bryant

Bryant, William Cullen (1794-1878) - American poet and editor of the New York Evening Post who practiced law before devoting his life to writing. A master of blank verse, Bryant's earliest works are considered his best. The WhiteFooted Deer (1844) - The title poem in Bryant's 1846 collection, "The WhiteFooted Deer and Other Poems." Opening lines: It was a hundred years ago, / When, by the woodland ways,...

THE WHITE FOOTED DEER

It was a hundred years ago, When, by the woodland ways, The traveller saw the wild-deer drink, Or crop the birchen sprays.

Beneath a hill, whose rocky side O'erbrowed a grassy mead, And fenced a cottage from the wind, A deer was wont to feed.

She only came when on the cliffs The evening moonlight lay, And no man knew the secret haunts In which she walked by day.

White were her feet, her forehead showed A spot of silvery white, That seemed to glimmer like a star In autumn's hazy night.

And here, when sang the whippoorwill, She cropped the sprouting leaves, And here her rustling steps were heard On still October eves.

But when the broad midsummer moon Rose o'er that grassy lawn, Beside the silver-footed deer There grazed a spotted fawn.

The cottage dame forbade her son To aim the rifle here; "It were a sin," she said, "to harm Or fright that friendly deer.

"This spot has been my pleasant home Ten peaceful years and more; And ever, when the moonlight shines, She feeds before our door.

"The red-men say that here she walked A thousand moons ago; They never raise the war-whoop here, And never twang the bow.

"I love to watch her as she feeds, And think that all is well While such a gentle creature haunts The place in which we dwell."

The youth obeyed, and sought for game In forests far away, Where, deep in silence and in moss, The ancient woodland lay.

But once, in autumn's golden time He ranged the wild in vain, Nor roused the pheasant nor the deer, And wandered home again.

The crescent moon and crimson eve Shone with a mingling light; The deer, upon the grassy mead, Was feeding full in sight.

He raised the rifle to his eye, And from the cliffs around A sudden echo, shrill and sharp, Gave back its deadly sound.

Away, into the neighboring wood, The startled creature flew, And crimson drops at morning lay Amid the glimmering dew.

Next evening shone the waxing moon As brightly as before; The deer upon the grassy mead Was seen again no more.

But ere that crescent moon was old, By night the red-men came,
And burnt the cottage to the ground, And slew the youth and
dame.

Now woods have overgrown the mead, And hid the cliffs from
sight; There shrieks the hovering hawk at noon, And prowls the
fox at night.

THE END