

Four Poems by Percy Bysshe Shelley

Ozymandias

I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: "Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown
And wrinkled lip and sneer of cold command
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed.
And on the pedestal these words appear:
'My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings:
Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!'
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,
The lone and level sands stretch far away".

To a Skylark

1 Hail to thee, blithe Spirit!
2 Bird thou never wert,
3 That from Heaven, or near it,
4 Pourest thy full heart
5 In profuse strains of unpremeditated art.

6 Higher still and higher
7 From the earth thou springest
8 Like a cloud of fire;
9 The blue deep thou wingest,
10 And singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest.

11 In the golden lightning
12 Of the sunken sun,
13 O'er which clouds are bright'ning,
14 Thou dost float and run;
15 Like an unbodied joy whose race is just begun.

16 The pale purple even
17 Melts around thy flight;
18 Like a star of Heaven,
19 In the broad day-light
20 Thou art unseen, but yet I hear thy shrill delight,

21 Keen as are the arrows
22 Of that silver sphere,
23 Whose intense lamp narrows
24 In the white dawn clear
25 Until we hardly see, we feel that it is there.

26 All the earth and air
27 With thy voice is loud,
28 As, when night is bare,

29 From one lonely cloud
30 The moon rains out her beams, and Heaven is overflow'd.

31 What thou art we know not;
32 What is most like thee?
33 From rainbow clouds there flow not
34 Drops so bright to see
35 As from thy presence showers a rain of melody.

36 Like a Poet hidden
37 In the light of thought,
38 Singing hymns unbidden,
39 Till the world is wrought
40 To sympathy with hopes and fears it heeded not:

41 Like a high-born maiden
42 In a palace-tower,
43 Soothing her love-laden
44 Soul in secret hour
45 With music sweet as love, which overflows her bower:

46 Like a glow-worm golden
47 In a dell of dew,
48 Scattering unbeholden
49 Its a{:e}real hue
50 Among the flowers and grass, which screen it from the view:

51 Like a rose embower'd
52 In its own green leaves,
53 By warm winds deflower'd,
54 Till the scent it gives
55 Makes faint with too much sweet those heavy-winged thieves:

56 Sound of vernal showers
57 On the twinkling grass,
58 Rain-awaken'd flowers,
59 All that ever was
60 Joyous, and clear, and fresh, thy music doth surpass.

61 Teach us, Sprite or Bird,
62 What sweet thoughts are thine:
63 I have never heard
64 Praise of love or wine
65 That panted forth a flood of rapture so divine.

66 Chorus Hymeneal,
67 Or triumphal chant,
68 Match'd with thine would be all
69 But an empty vaunt,
70 A thing wherein we feel there is some hidden want.

71 What objects are the fountains
72 Of thy happy strain?
73 What fields, or waves, or mountains?
74 What shapes of sky or plain?
75 What love of thine own kind? what ignorance of pain?

76 With thy clear keen joyance
77 Languor cannot be:
78 Shadow of annoyance
79 Never came near thee:
80 Thou lovest: but ne'er knew love's sad satiety.

81 Waking or asleep,
82 Thou of death must deem
83 Things more true and deep
84 Than we mortals dream,
85 Or how could thy notes flow in such a crystal stream?

86 We look before and after,
87 And pine for what is not:
88 Our sincerest laughter
89 With some pain is fraught;
90 Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.

91 Yet if we could scorn
92 Hate, and pride, and fear;
93 If we were things born
94 Not to shed a tear,
95 I know not how thy joy we ever should come near.

96 Better than all measures
97 Of delightful sound,
98 Better than all treasures
99 That in books are found,
100 Thy skill to poet were, thou scorner of the ground!

101 Teach me half the gladness
102 That thy brain must know,
103 Such harmonious madness
104 From my lips would flow
105 The world should listen then, as I am listening now.

Ode to the West Wind

1. The Peterloo Massacre (or Battle of Peterloo) occurred at St Peter's Field, Manchester, England, on 16 August 1819, when cavalry charged into a crowd of 60,000–80,000 that had gathered to demand the reform of parliamentary representation.
2. "Poets are the hierophants¹ of an unapprehended inspiration; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present; the words which express what they understand not; the trumpets which sing to battle, and feel not what they inspire; the influence which is moved not, but moves. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world."
3. In 1819, the same year this poem was written, Percy's and Mary's (the author of Frankenstein) son – William – died, while they were living in Italy (where "Ode to the West Wind" was written).

¹ A hierophant is a person who brings religious congregants into the presence of that which is deemed holy.

I

1 O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being,
2 Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
3 Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,

4 Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,
5 Pestilence-stricken multitudes: O thou,
6 Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed

7 The winged seeds, where they lie cold and low,
8 Each like a corpse within its grave, until
9 Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow

10 Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill
11 (Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air)
12 With living hues and odours plain and hill:

13 Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere;
14 Destroyer and preserver; hear, oh hear!

II

15 Thou on whose stream, mid the steep sky's commotion,
16 Loose clouds like earth's decaying leaves are shed,
17 Shook from the tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean,

18 Angels of rain and lightning: there are spread
19 On the blue surface of thine aëry surge,
20 Like the bright hair uplifted from the head

21 Of some fierce Maenad, even from the dim verge
22 Of the horizon to the zenith's height,
23 The locks of the approaching storm. Thou dirge

24 Of the dying year, to which this closing night
25 Will be the dome of a vast sepulchre,
26 Vaulted with all thy congregated might

27 Of vapours, from whose solid atmosphere
28 Black rain, and fire, and hail will burst: oh hear!

III

29 Thou who didst waken from his summer dreams
30 The blue Mediterranean, where he lay,
31 Lull'd by the coil of his crystalline streams,

32 Beside a pumice isle in Baiae's bay,
33 And saw in sleep old palaces and towers
34 Quivering within the wave's intenser day,

35 All overgrown with azure moss and flowers
36 So sweet, the sense faints picturing them! Thou
37 For whose path the Atlantic's level powers
38 Cleave themselves into chasms, while far below
39 The sea-blooms and the oozy woods which wear
40 The sapless foliage of the ocean, know

41 Thy voice, and suddenly grow gray with fear,
42 And tremble and despoil themselves: oh hear!

IV

43 If I were a dead leaf thou mightest bear;
44 If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee;
45 A wave to pant beneath thy power, and share

46 The impulse of thy strength, only less free
47 Than thou, O uncontrollable! If even
48 I were as in my boyhood, and could be

49 The comrade of thy wanderings over Heaven,
50 As then, when to outstrip thy skiey speed
51 Scarce seem'd a vision; I would ne'er have striven

52 As thus with thee in prayer in my sore need.
53 Oh, lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!
54 I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!

55 A heavy weight of hours has chain'd and bow'd
56 One too like thee: tameless, and swift, and proud.

V

57 Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:
58 What if my leaves are falling like its own!
59 The tumult of thy mighty harmonies

60 Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone,
61 Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,
62 My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!

63 Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
64 Like wither'd leaves to quicken a new birth!
65 And, by the incantation of this verse,

66 Scatter, as from an unextinguish'd hearth
67 Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!
68 Be through my lips to unawaken'd earth

69 The trumpet of a prophecy! O Wind,
70 If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

To Wordsworth

BY PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

Poet of Nature, thou hast wept to know
That things depart which never may return:
Childhood and youth, friendship and love's first glow,
Have fled like sweet dreams, leaving thee to mourn.
These common woes I feel. One loss is mine
Which thou too feel'st, yet I alone deplore.
Thou wert as a lone star, whose light did shine
On some frail bark in winter's midnight roar:
Thou hast like to a rock-built refuge stood
Above the blind and battling multitude:
In honoured poverty thy voice did weave
Songs consecrate to truth and liberty,—
Deserting these, thou leavest me to grieve,
Thus having been, that thou shouldst cease to be.