

1864

THE WINDS

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 Winds* (1864) - Opening lines: Ye winds, ye unseen currents of the air, / Softly ye played a few brief hours ago;...

THE WINDS

I -

Ye winds, ye unseen currents of the air,
Softly ye played a few brief hours ago;
Ye bore the murmuring bee; ye tossed the hair
O'er maiden cheeks, that took a fresher glow;
Ye rolled the round white cloud through depths of blue;
Ye shook from shaded flowers the lingering dew;
Before you the catalpa's blossoms flew,
Light blossoms, dropping on the grass like snow.

II -

What change is this! Ye take the cataract's sound;
Ye take the whirlpool's fury and its might;
The mountain shudders as ye sweep the ground;
The valley woods lie prone beneath your flight.
The clouds before you shoot like eagles past;
The homes of men are rocking in your blast;

Ye lift the roofs like autumn leaves, and cast,
Skyward, the whirling fragments out of sight.

III -

The weary fowls of heaven make wing in vain,
To escape your wrath; ye seize and dash them dead;
Against the earth ye drive the roaring rain;
The harvest-field becomes a river's bed;
And torrents tumble from the hills around,
Plains turn to lakes, and villages are drowned,
And wailing voices, midst the tempest's sound,
Rise, as the rushing waters swell and spread.

IV -

Ye dart upon the deep, and straight is heard
A wilder roar, and men grow pale, and pray;
Ye fling its floods around you, as a bird
Flings o'er his shivering plumes the fountain's spray.
See! to the breaking mast the sailor clings;
Ye scoop the ocean to its briny springs,

And take the mountain-billow on your wings,
And pile the wreck of navies round the bay.

V -

Why rage ye thus?- no strife for liberty
Has made you mad; no tyrant, strong through fear,
Has chained your pinions till ye wrench them free,
And rushed into the unmeasured atmosphere;
For ye were born in freedom where ye blow;
Free o'er the mighty deep to come and go;
Earth's solemn woods were yours, her wastes of snow,
Her isles where summer blossoms all the year.

VI -

O ye wild winds! a mightier Power than yours
In chains upon the shore of Europe lies;
The sceptred throng whose fetters he endures
Watch his mute throes with terror in their eyes;
And armed warriors all around him stand,
And, as he struggles, tighten every band,

And lift the heavy spear, with threatening hand,
To pierce the victim, should he strive to rise.

VII -

Yet oh, when that wronged Spirit of our race
Shall break, as soon he must, his long-worn chains,
And leap in freedom from his prison-place,
Lord of his ancient hills and fruitful plains,
Let him not rise, like these mad winds of air,
To waste the loveliness that time could spare,
To fill the earth with woe, and blot her fair
Unconscious breast with blood from human veins.

VIII -

But may he like the spring-time come abroad,
Who crumbles winter's gyves with gentle might,
When in the genial breeze, the breath of God,
The unsealed springs come spouting up to light;
Flowers start from their dark prison's at his feet,

The woods, long dumb, awake to hymnings sweet,
And morn and eve, whose glimmerings almost meet,
Crowd back to narrow bounds the ancient night.

THE END