

1819

ODE TO THE WEST WIND

Percy Bysshe Shelley

Shelley, Percy Bysshe (1792-1822) - English poet, he was a humanist and a Platonist who rejected all conventions which he thought stifled human freedom.

After the suicide of his estranged first wife, he eloped with Mary Wollstonecraft (Shelley) who later wrote the classic, "Frankenstein." Ode to the West Wind (1819) - In 1819 Shelley moved to Pisa where he composed many of his short verses, including "Ode to the West Wind." Opening line: O wild West Wind; thou breath of Autumn's being, ...

ODE TO THE WEST WIND

I

O wild West Wind; thou breath of Autumn's being,
 Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
 Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,
 Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,
 Pestilence-stricken multitudes:
 O thou, Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed
 The winged seeds, where they lie cold and low,
 Each like a corpse within its grave, until
 Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow
 Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill
 (Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air)
 With living hues and odors plain and hill:
 Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere;
 Destroyer and preserver; hear, oh, hear!

II

Thou on whose stream, mid the steep sky's commotion,
 Loose clouds like earth's decaying leaves are shed,
 Shook from the tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean,
 Angels of rain and lightning: there are spread
 On the blue surface of thine aery surge,
 Like the bright hair uplifted from the head
 Of some fierce Maenad, even from the dim verge
 Of the horizon to the zenith's height,
 The locks of the approaching storm. Thou dirge
 Of the dying year, to which this closing night
 Will be the dome of a vast sepulchre,
 Vaulted with all thy congregated might
 Of vapors, from whose solid atmosphere
 Black rain, and fire, and hail will burst: oh, hear!

III

Thou who didst waken from his summer dreams
 The blue Mediterranean, where he lay,
 Lulled by the coil of his crystalline streams,
 Beside a pumice isle in Baiae's bay,
 And saw in sleep old palaces and towers
 Quivering within the wave's intenser day,
 All overgrown with azure moss and flowers
 So sweet, the sense faints picturing them!
 Thou For whose path the Atlantic's level powers
 Cleave themselves into chasms, while far below
 The sea-blooms and the oozy woods which wear

The sapless foliage of the ocean, know
 Thy voice, and suddenly grow gray with fear,
 And tremble and despoil themselves: oh, hear!

IV

If I were a dead leaf thou mightest bear;
 If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee;
 A wave to pant beneath thy power, and share
 The impulse of thy strength, only less free
 Than thou, O uncontrollable! If even
 I were as in my boyhood, and could be
 The comrade of thy wanderings over Heaven,
 As then, when to outstrip thy skiey speed
 Scarce seemed a vision; I would ne'er have striven
 As thus with thee in prayer in my sore need.
 Oh, lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!
 I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!
 A heavy weight of hours has chained and bowed
 One too like thee: tameless, and swift, and proud.

V

Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:
 What if my leaves are falling like its own!
 The tumult of thy mighty harmonies
 Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone,
 Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,
 My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!
 Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
 Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!
 And, by the incantation of this verse,
 Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth
 Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!
 Be through my lips to unawakened earth
 The trumpet of a prophecy! O, Wind,
 If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind!

THE END