I was not heard—I saw them not—
When musing deeply on the lot
Of life, at that sweet time when winds are wooing
All vital things that wake to bring
News of buds and blossoming,—
Sudden, thy shadow fell on me;
I shrieked, and clasped my hands in extacy!

6

I vowed that I would dedicate my powers
To thee and thine—have I not kept the vow?
With beating heart and streaming eyes, even now
I call the phantoms of a thousand hours
Each from his voiceless grave: they have in visioned bowers
Of studious zeal or love's delight
Outwatched with me the envious night[7]—
They know that never joy illumed my brow
Unlinked with hope that thou wouldst free
This world from its dark slavery,
That thou—O awful LOVELINESS,
Wouldst give whate'er these words cannot express.

7

The day becomes more solemn and serene
When noon is past—there is a harmony
In autumn, and a lustre in its sky,
Which through the summer is not heard or seen,
As if it could not be, as if it had not been!
Thus let thy power, which like the truth
Of nature on my passive youth
Descended, to my onward life supply
Its calm—to one who worships thee,
And every form containing thee,
Whom, SPIRIT fair, thy spells did bind
To fear[8] himself, and love all human kind.

1816 1817

Ozymandias[1]

I met a traveller from an antique land,
Who said—"Two vast and trunkless° legs of stone *without a torso*
Stand in the desart. . . . Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,

7. I.e., stayed up until the night, envious of their delight, had reluctantly departed.
8. Probably in the old sense: "to stand in awe of."
1. According to Diodorus Siculus, Greek historian of the 1st century B.C.E., the largest statue in Egypt had the inscription "I am Ozymandias, king of kings; if anyone wishes to know what I am and where I lie, let him surpass me in some of my exploits." Ozymandias was the Greek name for Ramses II of Egypt, 13th century B.C.E.

Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive,° stamped on these lifeless things, *outlive*
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;[2]
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."

1817 1818

On Love[1]

What is Love? Ask him who lives what is life; ask him who adores what is God.

I know not the internal constitution of other men, nor even of thine whom I now address. I see that in some external attributes they resemble me, but when, misled by that appearance, I have thought to appeal to something in common and unburthen my inmost soul to them, I have found my language misunderstood, like one in a distant and savage land. The more opportunities they have afforded me for experience, the wider has appeared the interval between us, and to a greater distance have the points of sympathy been withdrawn. With a spirit ill-fitted to sustain such proof, trembling and feeble through its tenderness, I have every where sought, and have found only repulse and disappointment.

Thou demandest what is Love. It is that powerful attraction towards all we conceive, or fear, or hope beyond ourselves, when we find within our own thoughts the chasm of an insufficient void, and seek to awaken in all things that are, a community with what we experience within ourselves. If we reason, we would be understood; if we imagine, we would that the airy children of our brain were born anew within another's; if we feel, we would that another's nerves should vibrate to our own, that the beams of their eyes should kindle at once and mix and melt into our own; that lips of motionless ice should not reply to lips quivering and burning with the heart's best blood:—this is Love. This is the bond and the sanction which connects not only man with man, but with every thing which exists. We are born into the world, and there is something within us, which from the instant that we live, more and more thirsts after its likeness. It is probably in correspondence with this law that the infant drains milk from the bosom of its mother; this propensity develops itself with the development of our nature. We dimly see within our intellectual nature, a miniature as it were of our entire self, yet deprived of all

2. "The hand" is the sculptor's, who had "mocked" (both imitated and satirized) the sculptured passions; "the heart" is the king's, which has "fed" his passions.

1. Shelley's essay, likely composed in the summer of 1818 just after he translated Plato's *Symposium*, first appeared in print in *The Keepsake for 1829*—a miscellany of poems, stories, and engravings, edited by Frederick Mansel Reynolds. The *Keepsake* belonged to the group of publications that, debuting in Britain in the 1820s, were known as the literary annuals: sumptuously produced, bound in silk, these books were promoted as especially appropriate and tasteful gifts to be given to young women. Mary Shelley, who supplied Reynolds with her late husband's manuscript, was herself a frequent contributor to *The Keepsake*: see "The Mortal Immortal," p. 1036.

Is the theme of their debate,
Wrinkling their red gills the while—

Are ye—two vultures sick for battle,
Two scorpions under one wet stone,
Two bloodless wolves whose dry throats rattle,
Two crows perched on the murrained[2] cattle,
Two vipers tangled into one.

1819

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Ode to the West Wind[1]

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[2] 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[3] shall blow

Her clarion[4] o'er the dreaming earth, and fill
(Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air)
With living hues and odours plain and hill:

Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere;
Destroyer and Preserver;[5] hear, O hear!

2

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,

2. A *murrain* is a malignant disease of domestic animals.

1. This poem was conceived and chiefly written in a wood that skirts the Arno, near Florence, and on a day when that tempestuous wind, whose temperature is at once mild and animating, was collecting the vapours which pour down the autumnal rains [Shelley's note]. As in other major Romantic poems—e.g., the opening of Wordsworth's *Prelude*, Coleridge's "Dejection: An Ode," and the conclusion to Shelley's *Adonais*—the rising wind, linked with the cycle of the seasons, is presented as the correspondent in the external world to an inner change, a burst of creative power. In many languages the words for *wind, breath, soul*, and *inspiration* are identical or related. Thus Shelley's west wind is a "spirit" (the Latin *spiritus*: "wind," "breath," "soul," and the root word for *inspiration*), the "breath of Autumn's being," which on earth, sky, and sea destroy autumn to revive in the spring. In some p sophical histories written in Shelley's period spirit of liberty was said to have deserted Eu for the Americas. In blowing from the west wind may carry liberty back again.

Shelley's sonnet-length stanza, developed the interlaced three-line units of the Italian *rima* (*aba bcb cdc*, etc.), consists of a set of such tercets, closed by a couplet rhyming wit middle line of the preceding tercet: *aba bc ded ee*.

2. Referring to the kind of fever that occu tuberculosis.

3. The west wind that will blow in the spri

4. A high, shrill trumpet.

5. Refers to the Hindu gods Siva the Dest and Vishnu the Preserver.

Angels[6] 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 Mænad,[7] 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 vapours,° from whose solid atmosphere *clouds*
Black rain and fire and hail will burst: O hear!

3

Thou who didst waken from his summer dreams
The blue Mediterranean, where he lay,
Lulled by the coil of his chrystalline streams,[8]

Beside a pumice isle in Baiæ's bay,[9]
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 grey with fear,
And tremble and despoil themselves:[1] O hear!

4

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

6. In the old sense of messengers.
7. A female worshiper who danced frenziedly in the worship of Dionysus (Bacchus), the Greek god of wine and vegetation. As vegetation god he was fabled to die in the fall and to be resurrected in the spring.
8. The currents that flow in the Mediterranean Sea, sometimes with a visible difference in color.
9. West of Naples, the locale of imposing villas built in the glory days of imperial Rome. Their ruins are reflected in the waters of the bay, a sight Mary Shelley also describes in the Introduction to *The Last Man* (see p. 1032).
1. The vegetation at the bottom of the sea . . . sympathizes with that of the land in the change of seasons, and is consequently influenced by the winds which announce it [Shelley's note].

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.

5

Make me thy lyre,[2] 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![3]
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?

1819 1820

Prometheus Unbound

Shelley composed this work in Italy between the autumn of 1818 and the close of 1819 and published it the following summer. Upon its completion he wrote in a letter, "It is a drama, with characters and mechanism of a kind yet unattempted; and I think the execution is better than any of my former attempts." It is based on the *Prometheus Bound* of Aeschylus, which dramatizes the sufferings of Prometheus, unrepentant champion of humanity, who, because he had stolen fire from heaven, was condemned by Zeus to be chained to Mount Caucasus and to be tortured by a vulture feeding on his liver; in a lost sequel Aeschylus reconciled Prometheus with his oppressor. Shelley continued Aeschylus's story bu transformed it into a symbolic drama about the origin of evil and the possibility o overcoming it. In such early writings as *Queen Mab*, Shelley had expressed hi belief that injustice and suffering could be eliminated by an external revolutio that would wipe out or radically reform the causes of evil, attributed to existin social, political, and religious institutions. Implicit in *Prometheus Unbound*, on th other hand, is the view that both evil and the possibility of reform are the mora

2. The Eolian lyre, which responds to the wind with rising and falling musical chords.
3. This line may play on the secondary sense of "leaves" as pages in a book.