

## Shelley: Three Poems

### I. "Sonnet: England in 1819."

- A. Written in 1819 but not published until 1839
- B. Inspired by "Peterloo Massacre" of 16 August 1819
- C. Workers, including Waterloo veterans, demonstrated for greater representation in Parliament
  - 1. Saint Peter's Field near Manchester
  - 2. Demonstration violently broken up by militia
  - 3. "Peterloo" is a play on "Saint Peter's" and "Waterloo"
- D. "England in 1819" is a sonnet, though not strictly Petrarchan or Shakespearean
- E. Poem offers a harsh critique of the monarchy ("Princes, the dregs of their dull race, who flow / Through public scorn,—mud from a muddy spring," and rulers who are leeches drawing the blood from the country)
- F. The entire fourteen lines is a single sentence
  - 1. First twelve lines are a catalog of ills
  - 2. Verb finally comes in line thirteen: "Are graves from which a glorious Phantom may / Burst, to illumine our tempestuous day."
  - 3. All before the verb, Shelley considers to be dead
  - 4. All drives toward *burst*, a Phoenix-like bursting forth.

### II. "Ozymandias"

- A. Also a sonnet
- B. One of the most anthologized poems in English
- C. Ozymandias is the Greek form of the pharaoh Ramses II, patriarch of Egypt whom Moses challenged
- D. Statement in the middle of the poem is ironic
  - 1. "My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings; / Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!"
  - 2. We hear this through several layers of narration
    - a) Ozymandias's words are spoken
    - b) Sculptor inscribed words on statue's base but also reproduced the "wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command"
    - c) Speaker of the poem has not seen this statue and inscription himself
    - d) Has met a traveler who has seen the statue and read the words
    - e) Words are reported to the poem's speaker
    - f) Speaker in turn reports words to us
  - 3. Words of arrogance are now trunkless legs in the desert, surrounded by "lone and level sands."
  - 4. Shattered wreckage survives to mock his arrogance and render his words ironic

### III. "Ode to the West Wind"

- A. One of Shelley's most accomplished poems
- B. "West Wind" is a hybrid form with a strong Italian influence
  - 1. *terza rima* in sonnet stanzas
  - 2. rhymed *aba bcb cdc ded ee*
  - 3. Provides interlocking rhymes popular in Italian poetry
- C. Poem features much *enjambment* (lines whose phrases spill over onto subsequent lines), creating energy and force
- D. "West Wind" has a strong spiritual element, as does "Mont Blanc"
- E. "West Wind" derives much from Hinduism, in particular Hindu gods Shiva the Destroyer and Vishnu the Preserver

- F. The first stanza is filled with earth imagery, seeds, dreaming earth, etc.
- G. Second stanza turns to the sky: filled with imagery of clouds, storms, rain, the sky, vapors, and hail
- H. Third stanza employs sea imagery: filled with images of the ocean waves, “the Atlantic’s level powers,” “The sea-blooms and the oozy woods,” and “The sapless foliage of the ocean.”
- I. In fourth stanza, poet tries to participate in this energy of earth, sky, and sea, but is excluded
- J. He wants to align his poetry with the forces of rejuvenation that he sees all around him, but is unable to do so
- K. Final stanza has much imagery of decay (such as withered leaves)
  - 1. But final stanza also looks toward rebirth
  - 2. “Drive my dead thoughts over the universe, / Like wither’d leaves, to quicken a new birth”