

Mont Blanc: Lines Written in the Vale of Chamouni

By Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822)

3

1

The everlasting universe of things
 Flows through the mind, and rolls its rapid waves,
 Now dark -- now glittering -- now reflecting gloom --
 Now lending splendour, where from secret springs
 The source of human thought its tribute brings
 Of waters -- with a sound but half its own,
 Such as a feeble brook will oft assume,
 In the wild woods, among the mountains lone,
 Where waterfalls around it leap for ever,
 Where woods and winds contend, and a vast river 10
 Over its rocks ceaselessly bursts and raves.

2

Thus thou, Ravine of Arve -- dark, deep Ravine --
 Thou many-coloured, many-voiced vale,
 Over whose pines, and crags, and caverns sail
 Fast cloud-shadows and sunbeams: awful scene,
 Where Power in likeness of the Arve comes down
 From the ice-gulfs that gird his secret throne,
 Bursting through these dark mountains like the flame
 Of lightning through the tempest; --thou dost lie, 20
 Thy giant brood of pines around thee clinging,
 Children of elder time, in whose devotion
 The chainless winds still come and ever came
 To drink their odours, and their mighty swinging
 To hear -- an old and solemn harmony;
 Thine earthly rainbows stretched across the sweep
 Of the ethereal waterfall, whose veil
 Robes some unsculptured image; the strange sleep
 Which when the voices of the desert fail
 Wraps all in its own deep eternity;-- 30
 Thy caverns echoing to the Arve's commotion,
 A loud, lone sound no other sound can tame;
 Thou art pervaded with that ceaseless motion,
 Thou art the path of that unresting sound--
 Dizzy Ravine! and when I gaze on thee
 I seem as in a trance sublime and strange
 To muse on my own separate fantasy,
 My own, my human mind, which passively
 Now renders and receives fast influencings,
 Holding an unremitting interchange
 With the clear universe of things around; 40
 One legion of wild thoughts, whose wandering wings
 Now float above thy darkness, and now rest
 Where that or thou art no unbidden guest,
 In the still cave of the witch Poesy,
 Seeking among the shadows that pass by
 Ghosts of all things that are, some shade of thee,
 Some phantom, some faint image; till the breast
 From which they fled recalls them, thou art there!

Some say that gleams of a remoter world
 Visit the soul in sleep, -- that death is slumber, 50
 And that its shapes the busy thoughts outnumber
 Of those who wake and live. --I look on high;
 Has some unknown omnipotence unfurled
 The veil of life and death? or do I lie
 In dream, and does the mightier world of sleep
 Spread far around and inaccessibly
 Its circles? For the very spirit fails,
 Driven like a homeless cloud from steep to steep
 That vanishes among the viewless gales!
 Far, far above, piercing the infinite sky, 60
 Mont Blanc appears -- still, snowy, and serene;
 Its subject mountains their unearthly forms
 Pile around it, ice and rock; broad vales between
 Of frozen floods, unfathomable deeps,
 Blue as the overhanging heaven, that spread
 And wind among the accumulated steeps;
 A desert peopled by the storms alone,
 Save when the eagle brings some hunter's bone,
 And the wolf tracks her there -- how hideously
 Its shapes are heaped around! rude, bare, and high, 70
 Ghastly, and scarred, and riven. --Is this the scene
 Where the old Earthquake-dæmon taught her young
 Ruin? Were these their toys? or did a sea
 Of fire envelop once this silent snow?
 None can reply--all seems eternal now.
 The wilderness has a mysterious tongue
 Which teaches awful doubt, or faith so mild,
 So solemn, so serene, that man may be,
 But for such faith, with Nature reconciled; 80
 Thou hast a voice, great Mountain, to repeal
 Large codes of fraud and woe; not understood
 By all, but which the wise, and great, and good
 Interpret, or make felt, or deeply feel.

4

The fields, the lakes, the forests, and the streams,
 Ocean, and all the living things that dwell
 Within the dædal earth; lightning, and rain,
 Earthquake, and fiery flood, and hurricane,
 The torpor of the year when feeble dreams
 Visit the hidden buds, or dreamless sleep
 Holds every future leaf and flower; the bound 90
 With which from that detested trance they leap;
 The works and ways of man, their death and birth,
 And that of him and all that his may be;
 All things that move and breathe with toil and sound
 Are born and die; revolve, subside, and swell.
 Power dwells apart in its tranquillity,
 Remote, serene, and inaccessible:
 And this, the naked countenance of earth,
 On which I gaze, even these primæval mountains



John Martin - "The Bard" 1817

Teach the adverting mind. The glaciers creep
 Like snakes that watch their prey, from their far fountains, 100
 Slow rolling on; there, many a precipice
 Frost and the Sun in scorn of mortal power
 Have piled: dome, pyramid, and pinnacle,
 A city of death, distinct with many a tower
 And wall impregnable of beaming ice.
 Yet not a city, but a flood of ruin
 Is there, that from the boundaries of the sky
 Rolls its perpetual stream; vast pines are strewn
 Its destined path, or in the mangled soil 110
 Branchless and shattered stand; the rocks, drawn down
 From yon remotest waste, have overthrown
 The limits of the dead and living world,
 Never to be reclaimed. The dwelling-place
 Of insects, beasts, and birds, becomes its spoil;
 Their food and their retreat for ever gone,
 So much of life and joy is lost. The race
 Of man flies far in dread; his work and dwelling
 Vanish, like smoke before the tempest's stream,
 And their place is not known. Below, vast caves 120
 Shine in the rushing torrents' restless gleam,
 Which from those secret chasms in tumult welling
 Meet in the vale, and one majestic River,
 The breath and blood of distant lands, for ever
 Rolls its loud waters to the ocean-waves,
 Breathes its swift vapours to the circling air.

5

Mont Blanc yet gleams on high: --the power is there,
 The still and solemn power of many sights,
 And many sounds, and much of life and death. 130
 In the calm darkness of the moonless nights,
 In the lone glare of day, the snows descend
 Upon that Mountain; none beholds them there,
 Nor when the flakes burn in the sinking sun,
 Or the star-beams dart through them. --Winds contend
 Silently there, and heap the snow with breath
 Rapid and strong, but silently! Its home
 The voiceless lightning in these solitudes
 Keeps innocently, and like vapour broods
 Over the snow. The secret Strength of things 140
 Which governs thought, and to the infinite dome
 Of Heaven is as a law, inhabits thee!
 And what were thou, and earth, and stars, and sea,
 If to the human mind's imaginings
 Silence and solitude were vacancy?

1817

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834)

[Excerpts]

It is an ancient Mariner,
 And he stoppeth one of three.
 `By thy long beard and glittering eye,
 Now wherefore stopp'st thou me ?

The Bridegroom's doors are opened wide,
 And I am next of kin ;
 The guests are met, the feast is set :
 May'st hear the merry din.'

He holds him with his skinny hand,
 `There was a ship,' quoth he.
 `Hold off ! unhand me, grey-beard loon !'
 Eftsoons his hand dropt he.

And a good south wind sprung up behind ;
 The Albatross did follow,
 And every day, for food or play,
 Came to the mariner's hollo !

In mist or cloud, on mast or shroud,
 It perched for vespers nine ;
 Whiles all the night, through fog-smoke white,
 Glimmered the white Moon-shine.'

`God save thee, ancient Mariner !
 From the fiends, that plague thee thus !--
 Why look'st thou so ?'--With my cross-bow
 I shot the ALBATROSS.

Water, water, every where,
 And all the boards did shrink ;
 Water, water, every where,
 Nor any drop to drink.

The very deep did rot : O Christ !
 That ever this should be !
 Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs
 Upon the slimy sea.

About, about, in reel and rout
 The death-fires danced at night ;
 The water, like a witch's oils,
 Burnt green, and blue and white.

Ah ! well a-day ! what evil looks
 Had I from old and young !
 Instead of the cross, the Albatross
 About my neck was hung.

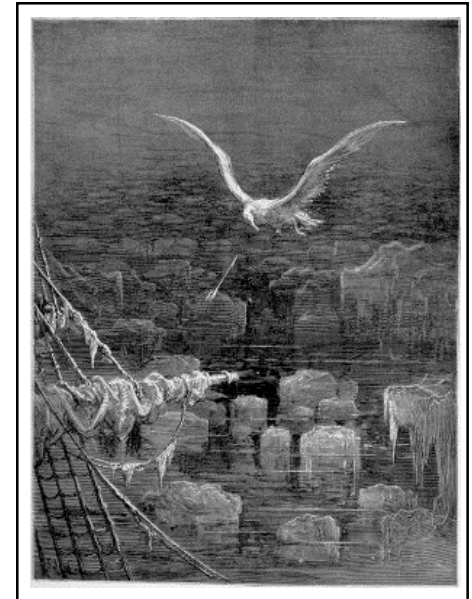
Farewell, farewell ! but this I tell
 To thee, thou Wedding-Guest !
 He prayeth well, who loveth well
 Both man and bird and beast.

He prayeth best, who loveth best
 All things both great and small ;
 For the dear God who loveth us,
 He made and loveth all.

The Mariner, whose eye is bright,
 Whose beard with age is hoar,
 Is gone : and now the Wedding-Guest
 Turned from the bridegroom's door.

He went like one that hath been stunned,
 And is of sense forlorn :
 A sadder and a wiser man,
 He rose the morrow morn.

1798



Gustave Doré's illustration of the shooting of the albatross