

Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Mutability" (1814-15; 1816)

We are the clouds that veil the midnight moon;  
How restlessly they speed, and gleam, and quiver,  
Streaking the darkness radiantly!--yet soon  
Night closes round, and they are *lost* forever:

Or like forgotten lyres, whose dissonant strings                   5  
Give various response to each varying blast,  
To whose frail frame no second motion brings  
One mood or modulation like the last.

We rest.--A dream has power to poison sleep;  
We rise.--One wandering thought pollutes the day;           10  
We feel, conceive or reason, laugh or weep;  
Embrace fond woe, or cast our cares away:

It is the same!--For, be it joy or sorrow,  
The path of its departure still is free:  
Man's yesterday may ne'er be like his morrow;           15  
Nought may endure but Mutability.

William Wordsworth's "Mutability" (1820)

From low to high doth dissolution climb,  
And sink from high to low, along a scale  
Of awful notes, whose concord shall not fail:  
A musical but melancholy chime,  
Which they can hear who meddle not with crime,           5  
Nor avarice, nor over-anxious care.  
Truth fails not; but her outward forms that bear  
The longest date do melt like frosty rime,  
That in the morning whitened hill and plain  
And is no more; drop like the tower sublime           10  
Of yesterday, which royally did wear  
His crown of weeds, but could not even sustain  
Some casual shout that broke the silent air,  
Or the unimaginable touch of Time.