

P. B. Shelley's "Mont Blanc" (1816; 1817)

I

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 5  
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.

II

Thus thou, Ravine of Arve--dark, deep Ravine--  
Thou many-colour'd, many-voiced vale,  
Over whose pines, and crags, and caverns sail  
Fast cloud-shadows and sunbeams: awful scene, 15  
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,  
Thy giant brood of pines around thee clinging, 20  
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 stretch'd across the sweep 25  
Of the aethereal waterfall, whose veil  
Robes some unsculptur'd image; the strange sleep  
Which when the voices of the desert fail  
Wraps all in its own deep eternity;  
Thy caverns echoing to the Arve's commotion, 30  
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 35

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 45  
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!

### III

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 unfurl'd  
The veil of life and death? or do I lie  
In dream, and does the mightier world of sleep 55  
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 65  
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 heap'd around! rude, bare, and high, 70  
Ghastly, and scarr'd, and riven.--Is this the scene  
Where the old Earthquake-daemon 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. 75

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 reconcil'd;  
Thou hast a voice, great Mountain, to repeal 80  
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.

#### IV

The fields, the lakes, the forests, and the streams,  
Ocean, and all the living things that dwell 85  
Within the daedal 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. 95  
Power dwells apart in its tranquillity,  
Remote, serene, and inaccessible:  
And this, the naked countenance of earth,  
On which I gaze, even these primeval mountains  
Teach the adverting mind. The glaciers creep 100  
Like snakes that watch their prey, from their far fountains,  
Slow rolling on; there, many a precipice  
Frost and the Sun in scorn of mortal power  
Have pil'd: dome, pyramid, and pinnacle,  
A city of death, distinct with many a tower 105  
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 strewing  
Its destin'd path, or in the mangled soil 110  
Branchless and shatter'd stand; the rocks, drawn down  
From yon remotest waste, have overthrown  
The limits of the dead and living world,  
Never to be reclaim'd. The dwelling-place  
Of insects, beasts, and birds, becomes its spoil; 115

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, 120  
And their place is not known. Below, vast caves  
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, 125  
Breathes its swift vapours to the circling air.

## V

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.  
In the calm darkness of the moonless nights, 130  
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 135  
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  
Which governs thought, and to the infinite dome 140  
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?