The Symbolism of the Wind and the Leaves in Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind"

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LXX

THE SYMBOLISM OF THE WIND AND THE LEAVES IN SHELLEY'S "ODE TO THE WEST WIND"

THE "Ode to the West Wind" has received considerable special comment from a number of students of Shelley. H. B. Forman[1] has indicated, in part, its emotional background; Professor H. C. Pancoast[2] has discussed it in relation to the scene and climate in which it was written; W. E. Peck[3] has pointed out parallels of its thought and imagery in Shelley's earlier work; and Professor B. P. Kurtz[4] has recently shown in an admirable study the relation of its theme of life and death and regeneration to the poet's "pursuit of death" throughout his work. There is wanting, however, a detailed account of the sources, the development, and the significance of the poem's central symbols, the Wind and the Leaves, and of the intellectual and emotional disturbances, associated for Shelley with the symbols, which may have been the direct causes of his writing the "Ode." This study attempts such an account.

On October 2, 1819, Shelley arrived in Florence with his wife, Mary, and Mary's step-sister, Jane Clairmont. In the following weeks he was preparing to have copies of the newly published "Cenci" shipped to London although he had just read in the *Quarterly Review* John Taylor Coleridge's malignant review of "The Revolt of Islam." He had begun to write the most important of his political tracts, "A Philosophical View of Reform"; he was reading and translating some of Calderon's work; and he was composing the fourth act of "Prometheus Unbound." For recreation, he went walking occasionally in the Cascine near Florence. Returning from one of these walks, he wrote on November 6 to his friends, John and Maria Gisborne:[5]

> We have had lightning and rain here in plenty. I like the Cascine very much, where I often walk alone, watching the leaves, and the rising and falling of the Arno. I am full of all kinds of literary plans.

Perhaps the earliest of these plans to be accomplished was the "Ode to the West Wind," written, no doubt, shortly after the sending of this letter, for to the poem published in the *Prometheus Unbound* volume of 1820 Shelley appended a footnote in which he said:

[1] "How Shelley Approached the 'Ode to the West Wind'," *Bulletin and Review of the Keats-Shelley Memorial,* Rome (London, 1913), I, No. 2, 6.

[2] "Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind'," *MLN*, XXXV, 97.

[3] *Shelley: His Life and Work* (New York, 1927).

[4] *The Pursuit of Death* (New York, 1933).

[5] Roger Ingpen, *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (London, 1914), II, 746.

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. They began, as I foresaw, at sunset with a violent tempest of hail and rain, attended by that magnificent thunder and lighting peculiar to the Cisalpine regions.[6]

Here Shelley recounts what appears to be the simple origin of the "Ode."

But the "Ode to the West Wind" had no such simple origin, and Shelley's statement of its immediate conception must be rejected if only because the poem is plainly something more than good description of a storm. To discover why the storm aroused such depths of thought and emotion as Shelley expresses in the "Ode," we must look not at the wind-blown, leaf-strewn Italian landscape, but deep into Shelley's mind, where, for nearly a decade, driving wind and flying leaves had been associated with his profoundest beliefs about nature and mankind. Of such beliefs the Wind and the Leaves were symbols, and it is necessary to consider their meaning before their sources and their development are examined.

The first stanza of the poem describes the leaves flying before the wind, which is represented as both destroyer of the leaves and preserver of the seeds from which new life will arise. As the first stanza reveals the power of the wind over the earth, so the second and third stanzas reveal its power over the heavens and the waters. In the fourth stanza the poet prays that he, like leaf, cloud, and wave, may undergo the power of the wind in order to achieve his own regeneration, and at the climax of the poem in the fifth stanza prays that from his dead thoughts driven over the earth by the wind there will arise in the cycle of the seasons a regenerating influence upon mankind. Thus the Wind, as the destroyer of the old order and the preserver of the new, for Shelley, symbolized Change or Mutability, which destroys yet re-creates all things; while the Leaves signified for him all things, material and spiritual, ruled by Change. The poem epitomizes Shelley's conception of the eternal cycle of life and death and resurrection in the universe.

That Shelley had begun early to interpret symbolically the phenomena of nature, in particular the cycle of life and death and resurrection as revealed in the turning of the seasons, is plain from one of the poems entitled "Song" in his second Gothic novel, "St. Irvyne,"[7] published early in 1811, whose lines

[6] The relation of the note to the letter in the dating of the poem is noted by Ingpen, *op. cit., ibid.*

[7] H. B. Forman, *The Prose Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (London, 1880), I, 260.

Ah! when shall day dawn on the night of the grave
Or summer succeed to the winter of death? (ll. 9–10.)

contain a metaphorical use of the cycle of the seasons analogous to, and anticipative of, his symbolical use of the cycle of the seasons in the "Ode to the West Wind."

Furthermore, if there is truth in Medwin's[8] assertion that Shelley "during the last two years of his stay at Eton . . . studied deeply Lucretius, whom he considered the best of the Latin poets," then it is likely that Shelley was familiar as early as 1810 with the concept of the power of Change in nature from reading in the *De Rerum Natura* (v, 830–836):

omnia migrant
omnia commutat natura et vertere cogit.
namque aliut putrescit et aevo debile languet,
porro aliut succrescit et e contemptibus exit.
sic igitur mundi naturam totius aetas
mutat et ex alio terram status excipit alter;
quod tulit ut nequeat, possit quod non tulit ante.

There seems, at least, to be a reflection of Lucretian atomism in Shelley's letter of June 20, 1811, to Elizabeth Hitchener:[9] "I conceive . . . that nothing can be annihilated, but that everything pertaining to nature, consisting of constituent parts infinitely divisible, is in continual change. . . ."

A more striking and closer early parallel of the thought and imagery of the "Ode" has been pointed out by W. E. Peck.[10] In the 1812 tract, "Proposals for an Association, etc.," Shelley wrote:

We see in Winter that the foliage of the trees is gone, that they present to the view nothing but leafless branches—we see that the loveliness of the flower decays, though the root continues in the earth. What opinion should we form of that man, who, when he walked in the freshness of the spring, beheld the fields enamelled with flowers, and the foliage bursting from the buds, should find fault with all this beautiful order, and murmur his contemptible discontents because winter must come, and the landscape be robbed of its beauty for a while again?[11]

Mr. Peck does not quote, however, the next sentence but one in the paragraph, which reveals Shelley's perception of the constant operation of natural law behind the changing phenomena of the seasons: "Do we not see that the laws of nature perpetually act by disorganization and reproduction, each alternately becoming law and effect (*sic*)."[12] This sentence shows that seven years before he wrote the "Ode" Shelley had definitely grasped his conception of the great law of Change; also, it

[8] H. B. Forman, *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley by Thomas Medwin* (London, 1913), p. 50. [9] *Letters*, I, 99. [10] *Op. cit.*, II, 159. [11] *Prose Works*, I, 386. [12] *Ibid.*

seems to supply the clue to the most important source of Shelley's conception of such a law, the *Système de la Nature* by Baron D'Holbach, published under the pseudonym of Mirabaud in 1770.[13]

According to Holbach's materialistic metaphysics the universe is ruled by the inflexible law of Necessity, the unbroken chain of causes and effects, whose operation is responsible for the continuous change in natural phenomena. Thus all the elements of nature are subject to the causal law, which creates, destroys, and re-creates:

> Leurs mouvemens naîssent sans interruption les uns des autres; ils sont alternativement des causes & des effets, ils forment ainsi un vaste cercle de générations & de destructions, de combinaisons & de décompositions qui n'a pu avoir de commencement & qui n'aura jamais de fin. En un mot la nature n'est qu'une chaîne immense de causes & d'effets qui découlent sans cesse les uns des autres. . . . Tous les phenomènes de la nature sont dûs aux mouvemens divers des matières variées qu'elle renferme, & qui font que, semblable au Phénix, elle renaît continuellement de ces cendres.[14]

Elaborating on this conception of the constant change in nature, Holbach says:

[13] Paul Heinrich Dietrich, baron D'Holbach, *Système de la Nature, ou Des Loix du Monde Physique et du Monde Moral* (London, 1770). That Shelley had been reading this work early in 1812 is shown by a letter written to Godwin on June 3, 1812: "I have just finished reading "La (*sic*) Système de la Nature." Do you know the real author? It appears to me a work of uncommon powers" (*Letters*, I, 315). Again, he wrote to Godwin on July 29, 1812: "I have read 'Le Système de la Nature,' and suspect this to be Helvetius's by your charges against it. It is a book of uncommon powers . . . " (*Letters*, I, 347). Shelley even considered translating the work; he wrote to Hookham the publisher on August 18, 1812: "I am about translating an old French work, professedly by M. Mirabaud . . . , "La (*sic*) Système de la Nature" (*Letters*, I, 360).

[14] *Système de la Nature*, I, 30–31. Shelley probably read also the footnote to this passage in which Holbach quoted several classical writers on the power of Change over Nature: "Omnium quæ in sempiterno isto mundo fuerunt futuraque sunt, aiunt principium fuisse nullum, sed orbem esse quemdam generantium nascentiumque, in quo uniuscujusque geniti initium simul & finis esse videatur. (V. Censorin, *De Die Natali*.) Le Poëte Manilius s'exprime de la même façon dans ses beaux vers:

> Omnia mutantur mortali lege creata,
> Nec se cognoscunt terræ vertentibus annis,
> Exutas variam faciem per sæcula gentes.
> At manet incolumnis Mundus suaque omnia servat,
> Quæ nec longa dies auget, minuitque senectus,
> Nec motus puncto currit, cursusque fatigat;
> Idem semper erit, quoniam semper fuit idem.
> (Manilii Astronom. Lib. I.)

Ce fut encore le sentiment de Pythagore, tel qu'il est exposé par Ovide au livre XV, de ses Métamorphoses Vers 165 & suiv.

> Omnia mutantur, nihil interit; errat & illinc
> Huc venit, hinc illuc. &c. (*Ibid.*)

Les animaux, les plantes et les minéraux rendent au bout d'un certain tems à la nature, c'est à dire à la masse générale des choses, au magazin universel, les élémens ou principes qu'ils en ont empruntés. . . . Les parties élémentaires de l'animal ainsi désunies, dissoutes, élaborées, dispersées, vont former de nouvelles combinaisons; elles servent à nourrir, à conserver ou à détruire de nouveaux êtres, & entre autres des plantes, qui parvenues à leur maturité nourissent & conservent de nouveaux animaux; ceux-ci subissent à leur tour le même sort que les premiers.

Telle est la marche constante de la nature; tel est le cercle éternel que tout ce qui existe est force de décrire. C'est ainsi que le mouvement fait naître, conserve quelque tems & détruit successivement les parties de l'univers les uns par les autres, tandis que la somme de l'existence demeure toujours la même.[15]

Holbach's conception of the continuous destruction and regeneration of life Shelley carried over into "Queen Mab," composed for the most part in 1812 and published in 1813. Holbach's influence is plain not only in the text of the poem, but also in the notes, where Shelley quotes long passages from the *Système de la Nature*. In "Queen Mab," seven years before the "Ode to the West Wind" was written, Shelley fitted to Holbach's conception of the law of change the symbols of the Wind as destroyer-preserver and the Leaves as the destroyed, and thus made his first attempt to write the "Ode":

> Thus do the generations of the earth
> Go to the grave, and issue from the womb,
> Surviving still the imperishable change
> That renovates the world; even as the leaves
> Which the keen frost-wind of the waning year
> Has scattered on the forest soil, and heaped
> For many seasons there—though long they choke,
> Loading with loathsome rottenness the land,
> All germs of promise, yet when the tall trees
> From which they fell, shorn of their lovely shapes,
> Lie level with the earth to moulder there,
> They fertilize the land they long deformed,
> Till from the breathing lawn a forest springs
> Of youth, integrity, and loveliness,
> Like that which gave it life, to spring and die.
> (v, ll. 1–15.)

As for the sources of the imagery, the poet himself has indicated them in the notes to the passage—the Wind from "Ecclesiastes" (I. 4–7) and the Leaves from the *Iliad* (VI. 146–149).

As early, then, as 1812, the Wind and the Leaves with their full symbolic significance were present in Shelley's poetry. For five years more the wind was to flutter at the gate of his imagination, the leaves were

[15] *Op. cit.*, I, 38–39.

to rustle in the hidden landscape of his mind, continually seeking and continually being denied their escape into the outer world, until once again they appeared with their full meaning in "Laon and Cythna." But there is ample evidence of their struggle to escape in the meantime and attain complete expression.

In a list of books requested from Hookham on December 27, 1812, Shelley noted Spenser's *Faerie Queen*.[16] In a passage from the second of the "Mutabilitie" cantos Spenser points out the mutability of all things in nature, presenting those ideas of life and death and resurrection that Shelley had already encountered in Holbach, Homer, and the Old Testament:

> For all that from her springs and is ybredde,
> However fair it flourish for a time,
> Yet see we soon decay, and being dead,
> To turn again unto their earthly slime.
> Yet out of their decay and mortal crime
> We daily see new creatures to arise,
> And of their winter springs another Prime,
> Unlike in form, and changed by strange disguise:
> So turn they still about and change in restless wise.

Although this stanza (VII, 57–63) does not contain the imagery of the Wind and the Leaves, yet these were still in Shelley's mind, and they revealed themselves early in 1814 in "Stanzas—April, 1814" (13), in letters to Hogg of August[17] and September, 1815,[18] and in "Alastor" (52–54; 583–586), composed in the autumn of 1815.

In the summer of 1817 Shelley composed his long narrative poem, "Laon and Cythna," in which the imagery appears again and again (I, 161–162; I, 381–382; IV, 1529–1530; V, 2281–2282; V, 2284–2286; VI, 2578–2583; VI, 2741–2743; X, 3937–3938; X, 4182–4184). At one point, however, as if his frequent use of the imagery had finally a cumulative effect, Shelley gave full expression to the symbols with all their clustered associations of life and death and regeneration.

In stanzas XXI–XXII[19] of the ninth canto, Cythna describes the coming of autumn and the return of spring. It is in the three following stanzas, XXIII–XXV, however, that Shelley interprets symbolically the turning of the seasons and the Wind and the Leaves:[20]

[16] Edward Dowden, *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (London, 1886), I, 336.

[17] *Letters*, I, 445. [18] *Letters*, I, 446.

[19] The resemblance of these two stanzas to the "Ode" are noted by W. E. Peck, *op. cit.*, II, 159; he suggests also comparison with canto II, ll. 928–939, where Shelley, though he does not use the imagery of the wind and the leaves, asserts the power of poetry to reform mankind as in the concluding lines of the "Ode."

[20] Cf. Byron in the fourth canto of *Childe Harold* (878–882), also composed in 1817:

The seeds are sleeping in the soil: meanwhile
The Tyrant peoples dungeons with his prey,
. . . . . .
This is the winter of the world;—and here
We die, even as the winds of Autumn fade,
. . . . . .
Behold! Spring comes, though we must pass, who made
The promise of its birth,— . . .
O dearest love! we shall be dead and cold
Before this morn may on the world arise;
(ll. 3676–3695.)

In short, in these six stanzas, as in "Queen Mab," the poet again attempted the writing of the "Ode to the West Wind," promising the birth of the new order of society from the ashes of the old.

A few months after he had completed "Laon and Cythna," Shelley wrote to Charles Ollier on November 25, 1817,[21] for a volume of Dante, and on December 7[22] wrote again asking for the Reverend Henry Francis Cary's translation of the *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*. If he already possessed Cary's translation of the *Inferno*, he had perhaps noted Dante's use of the imagery in the third canto (104–106) and Cary's footnote in which he quoted two more allusions to the wind and the leaves, one from the *Æneid* (VI, 309–310) and the other from *Paradise Lost* (I, 302–304), and Dante's use of the imagery once more in the ninth canto (67–71). In the works of 1817–18, he used the imagery in "Prince Athanase" (279–282)[23] and in "Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills" used it again with symbolic significance:

While like flowers
In the waste of years and hours,
From your dust new nations spring
With more kindly blossoming (163–166).

In the first two acts of "Prometheus Unbound," composed between September, 1818, and April, 1819, there are two more allusions to the wind and the leaves (I, 154–155; II, iv, 36–37) and another in "The Cenci" (V, iv, 138–140), written between May and August, 1819. In only one of these allusions does the deeper significance of the Wind and the Leaves appear, but the continual rhetorical use serves to show how

Thy tree hath lost its blossoms, and the rind,
Chopp'd by the axe, looks rough and little worth,
But the sap lasts, and still the seed we find
Sown deep, even in the bosom of the North;
So shall a better spring less bitter fruit bring forth.

[21] *Letters*, II, 561. [22] *Letters*, II, 564. [23] See also ll. 247–260; 290–292.

close they always were to the surface of Shelley's conscious, creative mind, and links his second complete use of the symbols in "Laon and Cythna" in 1817 to their first appearance in independent being in the "Ode to the West Wind" in the autumn of 1819.

Yet another literary source of the thought and imagery of the "Ode" may be attributed to Shelley's reading of Calderon during this autumn. The following three lines of Spanish verse, quoted by H. B. Forman,[24] together with Shelley's translation of them, in his edition of Shelley's notebooks, have not, however, been traced to Calderon; Shelley may merely have been trying his hand at Spanish verse under the inspiration of his study of the dramatist. At any rate, their thought and imagery approximate those of the "Ode" closely enough to be noted:

A florear les rosas madrugaron
Y para envejescere florecieron
Cuna e sepulcho (*sic*) in un boton hallaron [.

(The roses arose early to blossom & they blossomed to grow old & they found a cradle & a sepulchre in a bud [.)

But having finally written the "Ode" and given to the symbols their richest development, Shelley was not yet finished with them. They reappear as imagery in the poems of 1820: in "The Sensitive Plant" (III, 34–38, 82–83), in the "Ode to Naples" (2–3; 17–18), in "The Witch of Atlas" (286–287); in the poems of 1821, in "Epipsychidion" (536–537) and "Adonais" (136–138); in the poems of 1822, in "The Triumph of Life" (49–51; 528–529). In the briefer poems of 1820–1822, there are further allusions to the wind and the leaves: in "Autumn: A Dirge" (3–4); in "Remembrance" (5); in "Lines: 'When the lamp is shattered' " (32); in "The Zucca" (45).

This frequent use of the imagery again links the appearance of the symbols in all their significance in the "Ode" to their next complete expression in "Hellas," composed in the autumn of 1821.

A later Empire nods in its decay:
The autumn of a greener faith is come,
And wolfish change, like winter, howls to strip
The foliage in which Fame, the eagle, built
Her aerie, while Dominion whelped below.
The storm is in its branches, and the frost
Is on its leaves, and the blank deep expects
Oblivion on oblivion, spoil on spoil,
Ruin on ruin:— . . .
. . . . . .

[24] *Note Books of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (Saint Louis, 1911), I, 183.

Islam must fall, but we will reign together
Over its ruins in the world of death:—
And if the trunk be dry, yet shall the seed
Unfold itself even in the shape of that
Which gathers birth in its decay (870–891).

Finally, there should be mentioned one other poem, "Lines Written on Hearing the News of the Death of Napoleon," published with "Hellas" in 1821, which, though it does not use the imagery of the wind and the leaves, yet alludes to the re-creation of life from death; the Earth speaks:

To my bosom I fold
All my sons when their knell is knolled,
And so with living motion all are fed,
And the quick spring like weeds out of the dead (21–24).

From the foregoing it will be seen that the Wind and the Leaves were continually in Shelley's mind, but that on four separate occasions they revealed themselves in his poetry as symbols of his profoundest convictions. Shelley's full exposition in "Queen Mab" in 1812, in "Laon and Cythna" in 1817, in the "Ode to the West Wind" in 1819, and in "Hellas" in 1821 of what the Wind and the Leaves signified for him was not accidental; on these occasions their complete significance emerged from very definite causes.

In "Queen Mab" Shelley portrays the past of mankind as a golden summer, the present as a dreary winter, and the future as an eternally radiant spring. In the cycle of such seasons, in the mutability of all things, Shelley believed that nature and mankind were to achieve a regeneration into the glorious destiny he pictures in the last two sections of the poem. With these ideas consciously in his mind and consciously presented, the symbols of the Wind and the Leaves, epitomizing the same ideas, attained full expression in "Queen Mab." Again in "Laon and Cythna" as in "Queen Mab" Shelley was writing of the regeneration of society, and again the stimulus of his conscious convictions evoked those stanzas of the Wind and the Leaves in which he represented symbolically the death of the old order, and the rebirth from its ashes of the new order of society. So, too, while he was completing "Prometheus Unbound," a drama itself largely symbolic of the regeneration of the spirit of humanity, and while he was perhaps beginning to write "A Philosophical View of Reform,"[25] also concerned with the renovation of society, there rose to his mind the symbols of the Wind and the Leaves,

[25] It was on the MS of this work that Shelley wrote the footnote appended to the "Ode to the West Wind." See T. W. Rolleston, *A Philosophical View of Reform by Percy Bysshe Shelley* (London, 1920), p. 94.

with the consequent composition of the "Ode to the West Wind." And once more, in "Hellas," where he was writing of the rebirth of a nation, his conscious thought called up in his verse the Wind and the Leaves with all the symbolic meaning they had held for him since 1812.

The fact that the "Ode to the West Wind" contains more personal feeling than Shelley's other treatments of the subject may be explained by the circumstances of his life at the time he wrote the poem. "I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!"[26] he says. If it is remembered that a short time before he wrote the "Ode," he had received the April, 1819, copy of the *Quarterly Review* which contained a bitter attack upon the "Revolt of Islam,"[27] it is not surprising that the "Ode" should include some expression of his hurt.[28] Thus, the lines,

> Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
> Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!

may refer to the seemingly still-born "Revolt of Islam." So, too, "the trumpet of a prophecy" in the lines,

> Be through my lips to unawakened earth,
> The trumpet of a prophecy!

may refer to "Prometheus Unbound,"[29] which Shelley considered his

[26] Cf. Byron in *Childe Harold:*

> The thorns which I have reaped are of the tree
> I planted: they have torn me, and I bleed: (IV, 88–89).

[27] On October 15, 1819, Shelley wrote to Charles and James Ollier: "The droll remarks of the *Quarterly*, and Hunt's kind defence, arrived as safe as such poison, and safer than such an antidote, usually do." (*Letters*, II, 727.)

[28] H. B. Forman says: "There is no doubt that the indifference to Shelley's poetic merits evinced by his countrymen causes him far more chagrin than their attacks upon his political attitude or even his morals; and it was not a matter for much surprise to find him contemplating in the autumn of 1819 a poem in which his feelings upon the question should be set forth with some pique." ("How Shelley Approached the 'Ode to the West Wind'," *loc. cit.*, p. 6.) Forman shows that the two fragments, the first, beginning:

> What art thou, Presumptuous, who profanest
> The wreath to mighty poets only due,

and the second, beginning:

> And that I walk thus proudly crowned withal
> Is that 'tis my distinction;

both found in the "Ode to the West Wind" portions of Shelley's notebooks, and both expressive of his chagrin, are discarded early fragments of the "Ode." For further proof of the relation of these fragments to the "Ode," see Forman, *Note Books of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, I, 171–180.

[29] This is the suggestion of Professor N. I. White, *The Best of Shelley* (New York, 1932), p. 490: "Shelley was at this time engaged in describing the rebirth of humanity in the third act of *Prometheus Unbound*. Probably it is that poem in particular that Shelley has in mind as the 'trumpet of a prophecy' to 'unawakened earth'."

greatest work, and of which he had the highest hopes, a poem, too, in which were reborn those ideas of the regeneration of mankind which he had last expressed in the "Revolt of Islam."

There is one other fact of his emotional life which should be taken into consideration here: in the same letter of November 6, 1819, to the Gisbornes in which he mentioned his experience of the autumnal storm in the Cascine Forest, he said:[30] "I . . . am in hourly expectation of Mary's confinement: you will imagine an excuse for my silence." On November 12, Percy Florence Shelley was born, and on the thirteenth Shelley wrote to Leigh Hunt:[31] "Yesterday morning Mary brought me a little boy . . . You may imagine that this is a great relief and a great comfort to me amongst all my misfortunes, past, present, and to come." The birth of his child, a rebirth of himself in a sense, was, perhaps, another element in the nexus of thought and emotion which set him to the composition of the "Ode." These emotional disturbances, it might be said, gave the "Ode" independent being; for if they had not existed, it is likely, since he was composing "Prometheus Unbound" at the time he wrote the "Ode," that the poem would have been imbedded in the drama of 1819 as it had been in the philosophical poem of 1812 and the narrative poem of 1817 and as it was to be in the drama of 1821.

There were at least five distinct elements, then, in the composition of the "Ode to the West Wind": (1) the stimulus of the natural objects, the wind and the leaves, as he observed them earlier in his life and more immediately in the Cascine wood; (2) the philosophico-literary associations of the Wind and the Leaves as he encountered them in Homer, "Ecclesiastes," Spenser, Dante, Lucretius, and Holbach; (3) "Prometheus Unbound," which expressed his extensive conscious beliefs of what the Wind and the Leaves already signified for him in the depths of his unconscious mind; (4) the death and rebirth of his ideas as exemplified by the "Revolt of Islam" and "Prometheus Unbound" respectively; and (5) the birth of his son, a living symbol of his own regeneration, and so associated with the ideas of rebirth and regeneration symbolized by the Wind and the Leaves in the "Ode to the West Wind."

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[30] *Letters*, II, 744.

[31] *Letters*, II, 746.