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# Hymn to Intellectual Beauty

Percy Bysshe Shelley

1817

The awful shadow of some unseen Power  
Floats though unseen among us; visiting  
This various world with as inconstant wing  
As summer winds that creep from flower to flower;  
Like moonbeams that behind some piny mountain shower,  
It visits with inconstant glance  
Each human heart and countenance;  
Like hues and harmonies of evening,  
Like clouds in starlight widely spread,  
Like memory of music fled,  
Like aught that for its grace may be  
Dear, and yet dearer for its mystery.

Spirit of BEAUTY, that dost consecrate  
With thine own hues all thou dost shine upon  
Of human thought or form, where art thou gone?  
Why dost thou pass away and leave our state,  
This dim vast vale of tears, vacant and desolate?  
Ask why the sunlight not for ever  
Weaves rainbows o'er yon mountain-river,

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Why aught should fail and fade that once is shown,  
Why fear and dream and death and birth  
Cast on the daylight of this earth  
Such gloom, why man has such a scope  
For love and hate, despondency and hope?

No voice from some sublimer world hath ever  
To sage or poet these responses given:  
Therefore the names of Demon, Ghost, and Heaven,  
Remain the records of their vain endeavour:  
Frail spells whose utter'd charm might not avail to sever,  
From all we hear and all we see,  
Doubt, chance and mutability.  
Thy light alone like mist o'er mountains driven,  
Or music by the night-wind sent  
Through strings of some still instrument,  
Or moonlight on a midnight stream,  
Gives grace and truth to life's unquiet dream.

Love, Hope, and Self-esteem, like clouds depart  
And come, for some uncertain moments lent.  
Man were immortal and omnipotent,  
Didst thou, unknown and awful as thou art,  
Keep with thy glorious train firm state within his heart.  
Thou messenger of sympathies,  
That wax and wane in lovers' eyes;  
Thou, that to human thought art nourishment,  
Like darkness to a dying flame!  
Depart not as thy shadow came,  
Depart not—lest the grave should be,  
Like life and fear, a dark reality.

While yet a boy I sought for ghosts, and sped  
Through many a listening chamber, cave and ruin,

And starlight wood, with fearful steps pursuing  
Hopes of high talk with the departed dead.  
I call'd on poisonous names with which our youth is fed;  
I was not heard; I saw them not;  
When musing deeply on the lot  
Of life, at that sweet time when winds are wooing  
All vital things that wake to bring  
News of birds and blossoming,  
Sudden, thy shadow fell on me;  
I shriek'd, and clasp'd my hands in ecstasy!

I vow'd that I would dedicate my powers  
To thee and thine: have I not kept the vow?  
With beating heart and streaming eyes, even now  
I call the phantoms of a thousand hours  
Each from his voiceless grave: they have in vision'd bowers  
Of studious zeal or love's delight  
Outwatch'd with me the envious night:  
They know that never joy illum'd my brow  
Unlink'd with hope that thou wouldst free  
This world from its dark slavery,  
That thou, O awful LOVELINESS,  
Wouldst give whate'er these words cannot express.

The day becomes more solemn and serene  
When noon is past; there is a harmony  
In autumn, and a lustre in its sky,  
Which through the summer is not heard or seen,  
As if it could not be, as if it had not been!  
Thus let thy power, which like the truth  
Of nature on my passive youth  
Descended, to my onward life supply  
Its calm, to one who worships thee,  
And every form containing thee,

Whom, SPIRIT fair, thy spells did bind  
To fear himself, and love all human kind.