

## One-Page Essay Sample

Lord Byron  
British Literature  
Period 3

### Two Sides of the Same Coin

Shelley and Keats offer two contrary perspectives on the autumnal season in their poems “Ode to the West Wind” and “To Autumn” respectively. While both seem to suggest a powerful presence at work, their opinion as to the tone of this presence is strikingly dissimilar.

Shelley uses the wind as the physical expression of this spirit, suggesting immediately that it is visibly active in the changes of the season. Shelley’s spirit—the wind—is described repeatedly as “wild” and its actions as “swift,” “hectic,” and “fierce.” He paints a picture of an always aggressive and often destructive power. Keats, on the other hand, speaks of a subtle spirit with no tangible arm of action. His power is passive, allowing for a peaceful change in season, contrasting Shelley’s violent change.

Ironically, both arrive at the same point. While Shelley’s wind may violently shake the leaves from the trees and force thundering rain from the clouds, the end product is one of beauty, as the fallen leaves spread their seeds over the green land made fertile by the many rains. Keats’ power yields the same results: fertile crops, sweet-smelling flowers, and ripened fruits. The difference lies in how Keats perceives these changes. He doesn’t see it as violent or even aggressive, for that matter. Rather, he views the power as a nurturing spirit—a true “Mother Nature” allowing the earth to blossom.

Whereas Shelley views the seasonal change as a kind of continual repopulation, Keats sees it as a continuous growth. Shelley suggests that things must die before beautiful things can arise. In fact, he describes the wind as a “Destroyer and Preserver” at the same time, insinuating that the force behind the changes is a destructive one with good intentions. Keats’ power is gentle, however, and he seems to suggest that the seasonal change is just that—a change or cycle not in need of a new birth, but merely a rebirth.

In the end, the result remains the same. Shelley sketches an ominous image of autumn as a destructive means to a glorious end, while Keats describes a more peaceful and gradual order to this same glorious end. In a sense, he believes as much in the beauty of the change itself, as he does in the product it renders. Keats’ perception of the seasonal changes might find its musical equivalent in Tchaikovsky’s “The Nutcracker Suite,” while Shelley’s might be likened to Mussorgsky’s “A Night on Bald Mountain,” as presented in the Disney film, *Fantasia*.

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## ODE TO THE WEST WIND

### I

O WILD West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being  
Thou from whose unseen presence the leaves dead  
Are driven like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,

Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,  
Pestilence-stricken multitudes! O thou  
Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed

The wingèd seeds, where they lie cold and low,  
Each like a corpse within its grave, until  
Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow

Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill  
(Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air)  
With living hues and odours plain and hill;

Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere;  
Destroyer and preserver; hear, O hear!

### II

Thou on whose stream, 'mid the steep sky's commotion,  
Loose clouds like earth's decaying leaves are shed,  
Shook from the tangled boughs of heaven and ocean,

Angels of rain and lightning! there are spread  
On the blue surface of thine airy surge,  
Like the bright hair uplifted from the head

Of some fierce Mænad, even from the dim verge  
Of the horizon to the zenith's height,  
The locks of the approaching storm. Thou dirge

Of the dying year, to which this closing night  
Will be the dome of a vast sepulchre,  
Vaulted with all thy congregated might

Of vapours, from whose solid atmosphere  
Black rain, and fire, and hail, will burst: O hear!

### III

Thou who didst waken from his summer dreams  
The blue Mediterranean, where he lay,  
Lull'd by the coil of his crystalline streams,

Beside a pumice isle in Baia's bay,  
And saw in sleep old palaces and towers  
Quivering within the wave's intenser day,

All overgrown with azure moss, and flowers  
So sweet, the sense faints picturing them! Thou  
For whose path the Atlantic's level powers

Cleave themselves into chasms, while far below  
The sea-blooms and the oozy woods which wear  
The sapless foliage of the ocean, know

Thy voice, and suddenly grow gray with fear,  
And tremble and despoil themselves: O hear!

### IV

If I were a dead leaf thou mightest bear;  
If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee;  
A wave to pant beneath thy power, and share

The impulse of thy strength, only less free  
Than thou, O uncontrollable! if even  
I were as in my boyhood, and could be

The comrade of thy wanderings over heaven,  
As then, when to outstrip thy skiey speed  
Scarce seem'd a vision—I would ne'er have striven

As thus with thee in prayer in my sore need.  
O! lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!  
I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!

A heavy weight of hours has chain'd and bow'd  
One too like thee—tameless, and swift, and proud.

### V

Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:  
What if my leaves are falling like its own?  
The tumult of thy mighty harmonies

Will take from both a deep autumnal tone,  
Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,  
My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!

Drive my dead thoughts over the universe,  
Like wither'd leaves, to quicken a new birth;  
And, by the incantation of this verse,

Scatter, as from an unextinguish'd hearth  
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!  
Be through my lips to unawaken'd earth

The trumpet of a prophecy! O Wind,  
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

## TO AUTUMN

SEASON of mists and mellow fruitfulness!  
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;  
Conspiring with him how to load and bless  
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves run;  
To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees  
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;  
To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells  
With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,  
And still more, later flowers for the bees,  
Until they think warm days will never cease,  
For Summer has o'er-brimm'd their clammy cells.

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?  
Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find  
Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,  
Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;  
Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,  
Drows'd with the fume of poppies, while thy hook  
Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers;  
And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep  
Steady thy laden head across a brook;  
Or by a cider-press, with patient look,  
Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours.

Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?  
Think not of them, thou hast thy music too,—  
While barr'd clouds bloom the soft-dying day,  
And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;  
Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn  
Among the river shallows, borne aloft  
Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;  
And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;  
Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft  
The redbreast whistles from a garden-croft;  
And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.