

TOPIC: ODE TO THE WEST WIND

STANZA-I

1. ODE: The word ode originates from the Greek word aeidein, which means to sing or to chant. An ode is a lyric poem which is simple in approach, serious in subject, elevated in style, elaborate in stanzaic structure and generally emotional in address.
2. The Peterloo Massacre (1819) inspired Shelley to write Ode to the West Wind.
3. TYPES OF ODE: PINDARIC ODE, HORATIAN ODE AND IRREGULAR ODE.
4. Keats' odes like 'Ode to a Nightingale', 'To Autumn' are Horatian ode.
5. Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind' - Horatian ode.
6. The poem was written in CASCINE WOODS, outside of Florence, Italy on October 25, 1819. The poem was published in 1820.
7. 'O wild West Wind'- figure of speech employed is Apostrophe, alliteration, personification. In conformity with the characteristic of an ode, the poem begins with an emotional addressing.
8. 'thou breath of Autumn's being'- Autumn has been personified here. The west wind is the life energy of autumn. So long as the west wind blows, autumn lives. With the stopping of its blowing autumn dies and winter comes. Figure of speech- personification, metaphor.
9. 'thou from whose unseen presence...enchanter flees.'- Shelley here uses a brilliant SIMILE. The poet here compares the west wind to an enchanter and the withered leaves to ghosts. The ghosts fly away at the presence of an enchanter. Likewise the withered leaves fly away at the blow of the west wind.
10. 'yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red.'- figure of speech employed is POLYSYNDETON, CLIMAX. There is the IMPLIED SUGGESTION

of making room for the new. The withered leaves, however, suggest the diseased aspects of life.

11. 'pestilence stricken multitude'- the withered leaves have been compared with people suffering from epidemic. Figure of speech employed here is metaphor.
12. 'O thou,/ Who chariotest them to their dark wintry bed'- The west wind transports the SEEDS to their dark wintry bed. 'Wintry bed' is a symbol of grave here.
13. 'where they lie cold and low,'- The winged seeds lie cold and low in their dark wintry bed. The autumnal west wind transports them to their dark wintry bed to preserve the life force so that they sprout out in spring.
14. 'Each like a corpse'- SIMILE. The pronoun 'each' here refers to the winged seeds. The seeds have been compared with dead bodies. According to Christianity, the dead bodies will be resurrected on the Final Day of Judgement. Likewise, the seeds will leap to life in spring.
15. 'Thine azure sister of the spring shall blow her clarion of the dreaming earth.'- vernal wind is here referred to as the SISTER of her brother WEST WIND. Biblical reference to the arch angel ISRAFIL with whose blowing of the trumpet the dead bodies will be resurrected. Vernal wind here does the same function of Israfil. 'Azure' means soft and gentle.
 'Dreaming earth' means the earth is asleep in winter/ the life force of earth remains in a suspended condition in winter.
16. 'Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air.'- Case of SIMILE, the spring wind has been compared here to a shepherd. A shepherd grazes sheep in meadows and valleys. Likewise, vernal wind will call up the lovely buds from their dark wintry bed to come up on the surface of the earth and graze like sheep. But they will feed not on grass but on wind.
17. Destroyer and preserver:- The west wind is destroyer in the sense it destroys what is time worn and ill fitten in nature like the withered leaves. Simultaneously it plays the role of preserver of LIFE as it transports the seeds to their dark wintry bed so that they can leap into life once again in spring. PERSONIFICATION.

STANZA-II

18. 'Thou on whose stream'- Shelley here METAPHORICALLY compares the west wind to a stream which carries air instead of water.
19. 'Loose clouds like the earth's decaying leaves are shed'- SIMILE. Small pieces of cloud, severed from big masses because of the flow and blow of the west wind are here compared to leaves dropping from the branches of trees on the waves of a river.
20. 'Shook from the tangled boughs of heaven and ocean'- Shelley here compares the column-like mass of cloud, which goes up from the sea towards the sky and spread there horizontally, to a tree with leafy branches at the top. Shelley here seems to refer to Norse mythology. The allusion is to the Tree of Life, called Yggdrasil, whose roots go down to the Hells, the trunk is visible on Earth and the blossoms sprout in Heaven. The image of the tangled boughs suggests how closely the intertwined cloud-strips resembled the branches of a huge tree.
21. 'Angels of rain and lightning.'- Clouds are angels of rain and lightning.
22. 'they are spread on the blue surface of thine airy surge'- The pronoun 'they' here refers to the clouds.
23. 'Like the bright hair uplifted from the head/ Of some fierce Maenad.'- SIMILE. Shelley here compares the small pieces of cloud, severed from the big masses because of the flow and blow of the west wind, to the loose hair of some Maenad, **a frenzied female attendant of Bacchus, the Greek god of wine.** The comparison suggests the demonic forces of the west wind.
24. '...the locks of the approaching storm'- Clouds borne by the raging west wind are here compared with the locks of hair on the head of some fierce Maenad.
25. 'Thou dirge of the dying year...vapours'- A dirge is a funeral song. Shelley fancies that the wailing noise of the raging west wind is a dirge that laments the expiry of the year.

26. How is the tomb for the dying year imagined by the poet?

Shelley compares the closing of the year with a dying person. The sky overcast with dark clouds is imagined as the vault of the vault of tomb in which the dying year will be buried. The sweeping sound of the west wind is compared with a funeral song because it sounds like the lament of nature for the dying year.

STANZA- III

27. 'Thou who didst waken from his summer dreams.'-The west wind awakens the blue Mediterranean Sea from HIS summer sleep.

In his summer sleep the Mediterranean Sea dreams of the roman palaces and towers submerged in its bosom.

28. 'Lull'd by the coil of his crystalline streams.'- The soft musical murmur of the streams of clear water falling in the Mediterranean Sea acts as a lullaby and puts the ocean to sleep.

29. 'beside a pumice isle'- Pumice isle means an island made of lava. An island made of lava is a natural feature of oceanscape. Shelley fancies that the pumice isle is used as a pillow to rest his head during his sleep by the Mediterranean Sea.

30. 'Baiae's bay'- Baiae is the name of a gulf between Ostia and Naples on the western coast of Italy. The old Roman palaces and towers were situated along lines of Baiae's Bay.

31. 'Quivering within the wave's intanser day.'- The ruins of the old Romans palaces and towers quiver/tremble because of the motion of the waves which in turn is caused by the west wind's flow and blow.

Intanser means more bright. Because of light refraction, the roman palaces and towers appear brighter under the blue water than on the surface.

32. 'All overgrown with azure moss and flowers/ So sweet, the sense faints picturing them.'- The old Roman palaces and towers are now a part of the ocean bed. As because they are submerged in the ocean, they are now overgrown with submarine plants and flowers. Because of light refraction they are looking so bright. The scene is so charming that human sense cannot feel it. **HYPERBOLE.**

33. 'For whose path the Atlantic level powers / Cleave themselves into chasms...' Shelley here describes the activity of the west wind on the Atlantic ocean. Because of the demonic forces of the west wind the waves of the Atlantic ocean move apart from each other and create a deep hallow passage to let the storm blow.
34. 'The sea-blooms and the oozy woods which wear/ The sapless foliage of the ocean know thy voice, and suddenly grow gray with fear'- The phrase 'sea blooms and the oozy woods' refers to the various plants and woods growing on the ocean bed.
- 'Sapless foliage of the ocean' means there is no sap or juice in the stem of those plants i.e., they are pale in colour. This is, however, because they do not get the touch of sunlight or soil of the earth.
- The plants are pale in colour because they don't get the touch of sunlight or soil of the earth, but Shelley attributes their lack of greenness to fear for the west wind. Just as human beings grow pale in fear, so the sea plants are supposed to grow grey as they listen to the raging voice of the wild west wind.
35. 'and tremble and despoil themselves: oh, hear!' - human beings give away their ornaments to robbers to save their lives. Likewise, as Shelley fancies the sea-blooms and the oozy woods out of their fear for the west wind shed their leaves to save their main stem.

STANZA-IV

36. 'If I were a dead leaf...thy power and share.'- Shelley here in these lines subjectively aspires after the force and impulse of the demonic west wind. He wishes to be a DEAD LEAF OR A SWIFT CLOUD OR A WAVE so that the west wind can directly transmit his energy to the poet who feels weak and impotent (under the heavy weight of the thorns of life) to make the people realize his view and vision of a utopian world. The poet hopes that if he could share the strength and impulse of the west wind, he would be able stir the people into an intense longing for a golden millennium that would stand for liberty, equality, fraternity and prosperity.
37. '...only less free than thou, O uncontrollable.'-the pronoun 'thou' here refers to the west wind. The poet here compares himself to the west wind only to admit his limitations. The is an uncontrollable, indomitable spirit.

On the contrary the poet feels less free as he has been burdened by the sad realities of life. SIMILE

38. 'If even I were as in my boyhood...' - here in this line the poet makes a nostalgic yearning for the bygone days of his childhood when, he feels, possessed the same uncontrollable spirit as the west wind possesses.

39. 'As then, when to outstrip thy skyey speed/Scarce seemed a vision.' - The phrase 'thy skyey speed' refers to the indomitable spirit of the west wind.

The poet feels that during his childhood days he possessed the same kind of indomitable spirit. He further fancies that even it did not seem impossible to him to beat the west wind in point of its strength and energy.

40. 'I would never have striven /As thus with thee in prayer in my sore need.' - Shelley feels weak and impotent under the burden of the thorns of life. And the phrase 'sore need' refers to his extremely distressed situation.

Shelley means that had he not been bogged down by the sad realities of life and had he not lost his strong imagination and indomitable spirit, he would never have begged persistently like this. Being fundamentally proud and independent, this begging hurts him.

41. 'oh, lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud.' - Shelley here profusely prays to the west wind to lift him as a wave or a leaf or a cloud so that he share the west wind's strength and impulse.

42. 'I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed.' - the 'thorns of life' refers to the odds and knots/ sorrows and suffering that he encountered in his personal life. These odds and knots made him weak and impotent and caused internal hemorrhage in his heart of hearts. METAPHOR

43. 'A heavy weight of hours has chained and bowed.' Shelley feels as if he has been fettered under the heavy weight of sorrows and sufferings, troubles and tortures that he faced because of his unorthodox view and vision of life.

44. 'One too like thee, tameless, swift and proud.' - the pronoun ;'one' refers to Shelley himself. 'Thee' refers to the west wind. SIMILE

Even though Shelley has been bogged down by the odds and knots in the society, in spirit he feels akin to the west wind.

Point of SIMILARITIES between the west wind and Shelley:
TAMELESS, SWIFT AND PROUD.

STANZA- V

45. 'Make me thy lyre even as the forest is/ what if my leaves are falling like its own.'- A lyre is a musical instrument. The poet here draws between himself and the autumnal forest. Trees are leafless during autumn. Likewise Shelley also feels that he is past the prime and peak of his imaginative flourish because of the sad realities of life.

46. 'The tumult of thy mighty harmonies/ Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone.' By thy 'mighty harmonies' Shelley means the powerful music of the west wind.

'Both' refers to the autumnal forest and the poet's dry self.

The west wind blows through the autumnal forest and produces loud music. Even though the trees are leafless, the west wind uses their(trees) branches as the strings and elicits music out of them. The poet requests the west wind to make similar use of his high strung mind and elicit similar music.

47. "Sweet though in sadness."- It refers to the music produced by the west wind. It is sweet because it heralds regeneration/ rebirth in nature. It is sad because it brings destruction before creation.

48. 'Be thou me, Spirit fierce, my spirit, be thou me, impetuous one;- Spirit fierce here refers to the indomitable west wind.

'Impetuous one' means violent or uncontrollable one.

Shelley begs to the west wind to completely identify himself(west wind) with him(shelley) so that he could share its strength and impulse.

49. 'Drive my dead thoughts over the universe...new birth.' - "Dead thoughts" here refers to Shelley's unfulfilled view and vision of life. They are dead because they have not yet been realized.

With a beautiful simile Shelley here compares his dead thoughts with withered leaves. Incidentally withered leaves fall on the ground because of the flow and blow of the west wind, they rot there and make the soil more fertile which in turn serves as the birthplace of a new generation of plants. Shelley also wants to scatter his dead thoughts among mankind so that they would lead to the creation of a better social order.

50. 'and by the incantation of this verse...words among mankind.' - Shelley here compares himself with an unextinguished hearth and his prophetic thoughts with ashes. By the wind the ashes from the unextinguished hearth scatter and produce sparkle. Likewise, Shelley wants to sparkle his prophetic thoughts which lie down in his heart. These prophetic thoughts would create a better social order. (Incantation means magical power. Shelley believes that if his prophetic thoughts reach the people, it would work as magic and would stir the people into an intense longing for a beautiful tomorrow.

51. 'be through my lips to the unawakened earth/ the trumpet of a prophecy.' - The earth is unawakened because the people inhabiting it are completely ignorant of Shelley's view and vision of life.

The trumpet of prophecy refers to Shelley's dream for a utopian world. He wants the west wind help him to realize his noble aim.

52. 'O Wind, If....behind.' Apostrophe, Rhetorical Question. Reveals Shelley's robust optimism. Winter stands for hard time. Spring stands for Shelley's view and vision of a beautiful tomorrow.

53. Matthew Arnold calls Shelley 'AN INEFFECTUAL ANGEL BEATING IN THE VOID HIS LUMINOUS WINGS IN VAIN.'

With thanks,
Dr. A.Rahaman.

