

Ode to the west wind

[Literature](#), [Poetry](#)



The Summary of P. B. Shelley's Ode to the West Wind Published in 1820, P. B. Shelley's Ode to the West Wind, is a poem which allegorizes the role of the poet as the voice of change and revolution. Shelley realizes that he cannot in actual life, rise to the height of imaginative perfection, which was his dream. But it is his bold optimism that he invokes the West Wind to blow the clarion call to the 'unawaken'd earth' and to sow the seeds of hope of regeneration. The poem begins with three stanzas describing the wind's effects upon earth, air, and ocean. The last two stanzas are Shelley speaking directly to the wind, asking for its power, to lift him like a leaf, a cloud or a wave and make him its companion in its wanderings. He asks the wind to take his thoughts and spread them all over the world so that the youth are awoken with his ideas. The poem ends with an optimistic note which is that if winter days are here then spring is not very far. The poem begins with the poet's apostrophizing the west wind. The poet uses the epithet 'wild' for the West Wind to refer to the untamable, swift, proud, fierce and impetuous spirit of the West Wind. The poet calls it the sustaining air of the autumn season. It is this violent wind which with a rush sweeps and strips off leaves from trees like ghosts escaping away from the spell of an enchanter. The West Wind rushes through the wood like a living river bearing dead leaves, pale, yellow, black, hectic red which are badly affected by epidemic. The Wind like a chariot drives them until they lie down on their winter bed and are covered with snow. It drives the ripe autumnal seeds underground where they lie buried like dead bodies in a grave during the winter season to shoot forth into plants of coloured and fragrant flowers over plain land and hills as soon as Zephyr, 'azure sister' of the Spring spreads its vivifying influence

over nature. The poet then calls this wild spirit, 'Destroyer and preserver' as it destroys decayed leaves and preserves the seeds by driving them underground. It destroys only to create the new. The first stanza thus strikes the keynote of the poem that out of the evil of the destruction Shelley hopes to rebuild a regenerated humanity. In the second stanza the West wind is described as one that drives the clouds. It is like a stream that flows between the steep sky and land and carries with itself the loose clouds. Shelley's creates an image of the clouds by comparing it to the leaves that hangs from the boughs of a tree. The clouds hang from the tangled boughs of heaven and clouds. The clouds are called the 'angels of rain and lightning' which in a biblical way means that the clouds are the messengers of rain. Shelley while describing the aspect of the mighty west wind as it sweeps the upper regions of the sky compares the disorderly wavy strands of cloud scurrying in the wind with the dishevelled hair of Maenad, the fierce, intoxicated woman-worshipper of the god of wine who danced about in her frenzy, killing animals in honour of her god. These clouds with their wavy hair are everywhere 'from the dim verge/of the horizon to the zenith's height'. The terrible howling of the West Wind seems to be the funeral song of the dying year. The sky covered with a dome of clouds looks like a 'sepulchre' i. e. a burial chamber or grave for the dying year or the year which is coming to an end. In the third stanza the poet refers to the effect of West Wind in the water. The West Wind disturbs the happy summer dreams of the blue Mediterranean, which lies down as the crystalline streams sing lullaby to it, by its wild commotion. The West Wind awakens the blue Mediterranean from its sweet dream of the submerged palaces and towers of Baiae. The old

towers and palaces are all overgrown with moss and flowers and the West Wind trembles them by making the sound of an approaching storm. The West Wind creates a deep chasm into Atlantic by its powerful movement. The vegetation at the bottom of the ocean, 'the sea blooms', 'the oozy woods', they all know by the roaring sound that it is the West Wind. They turn grey out of fear, tremble and the flowers shake off their petals. In the fourth stanza the poet speaks in his own person and invokes the West Wind for strength and inspiration. He wishes to be like the dead leaf, the swift cloud and the wave which are all dominated by the power of the West Wind. He sees in himself the end of his boyhood power when he felt he could even race against the West Wind. But that seems to be a distant vision now. Now the chains of hours have pulled him down; he has fallen on the thorns of life; troubles and oppressions have told upon his spirit. He is burning with desire to have some of the impulsive force of the mighty wind which is untamed, swift and proud. Here Shelley presents himself as a suffering, miserable creature and he desires to share the indomitable energy of the West Wind and prays to it to lift him as it lifts a leaf, a cloud and a wave. But the poet's despair gives way to new hope in the final stanza. He wants to offer himself to the West Wind as a lyre so that it can play its own tune and blow its energy into the poet. He wants to give himself away in the same way as the leaves in the forest have given. He wants the wind to blow in him, its own impetuous spirit. And after reciting the verse of the West Wind he will spread amongst the human society, which is sunk low in apathy, narrowness, moral, intellectual and spiritual filth, the hope of regeneration. In his last lines

Shelley puts forth his idea that reconstruction will follow destruction. People will enjoy the spring season fully and leave the winter behind.