

Ode to west wind

1. Introduction and background

Ode to the West Wind is the most famous ode written by the revolutionary poet, Shelley. The ode was published along with other poems and a drama in four acts, Prometheus Unbound in 1820. The poem is said to have been written when Shelley was in Cascine Wood, near Florence, Italy. The ode features a message of change (and hope) and revolution. While some argue that the poem was written when his son William breathed his last. While the allegorical significance of the Peterloo Massacre in August 1819 is present inside the poem and his other works like "The Masque of Anarchy" and "England in 1819".

2. Themes

I. Death and rebirth

Death and rebirth is the dominant theme of the Ode. The poet proudly calls the wind "destroyer and preserver". The West Wind brings a tremendous wave of snow that kills everything that comes in its way. The poet welcomes its death. Because according to him, it will lead to a new birth of life better and more learned than the previous one.

II. Poetry and rebirth

The second theme inside the ode is poetry and rebirth. The poet believes that in order for life to thrive again, it has to die itself down. He cannot attain the destructive powers of the wind. But he requests the wind to make him a lyre. A lyre is a musical instrument that poets used to play when they recited their poetry. Here, Shelley implores from the wind to spread his ideas. The addressor wants to shape a new world based on new principles through his poetry. Thus, Shelley wants to make his poetry a means of rebirth.

3. Figurative Analysis

Shelley has used numerous literary devices to shine through his poetic genius. There are multiple instances of simile when the poet compares two things with the word "like" or "as". The examples from the poem are stated below:

Loose clouds like earth's decaying leaves are shed

Each like a corpse within its grave

The poem hides many symbols to be discovered. The West Wind stands as a mighty symbol of the mighty force of Nature. Dead leaves signify the show of destruction while dying eyes mean the end of a season. The poet has also personified the West Wind to add humanistic qualities to it by calling it "destroyer and preserver", adding the quality of a rider "Who chariotest" and by "wake[ing]n from his summer dreams".

4. Setting and Imagery

There is no specific setting of the poem as the West Wind goes through the forest to the ocean. The poem is manifested in vivid imagery that helps a reader visualize the destructive and constrictive power of the West Wind. The images may include like, "dark wintery bed", "Angles of rain and lightning". The auditory images in this poem are "Black rain and fire and hail will burst", "the trumpet of a prophecy" and "Her clarion". But the images do not end there. The poem boasts a host of kinetic imagery that represent movement like, "Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere" and "Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth Ashes and sparks".

5. Structural Analysis

Ode to the West Wind is composed of 70 (14 * 5) lines. The poem is divided into 5 Contos (Parts) while each Conto is further divided into 5 stanzas (25 total) in which the first four are Terza Rima and the fifth one is a rhyming couplet. A Terza Rima is a stanza in which the first and third lines rhyme with each other while the second line rhymes with the first and the third line of the second stanza and so on. So, the rhyme scheme of this poem per canto is ABA, BCB, CDC, DED and EE. The poem follows a rhythmic pattern of iambic pentameter and iambic hexameter.

6. Conclusion

Ode to the West Wind is Shelley's Romantic endeavour in raising his voice against the oppressors of the world. The poem is an indirect warning to the dictators of the world to correct their business or else the West Wind of revolution will sweep them away.