

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY (1792-1822)

1. Read the note. What specific, concrete setting and experience gave rise to the poem?

The poem was conceived and chiefly written in a wood that skirts the Arno, near Florence, on a day there were a tempestuous wind, with a violent tempest of hail, rain and a thunder.

2. Now read the poem. As the text is rather long and complex, make notes on the content by completing the outline below.

a) The West Wind.

1. *Its nature (stanza I)*

- *Essence of seasonal change*
- *Destroyer*
- *Preserver*

2. *Its powerful activity (stanza I, II, III)*

- *On earth: it sweeps away dead leaves and scatters new seeds*
- *In the air: it transports new seeds, bringing rain and lightning*
- *On and under the sea: powerful surface of the Atlantic was torn in the depths and suddenly grow grey*

b) The West Wind and the poet/speaker.

1. *The first part of poet's prayer (stanza IV)*

- *the poet wants to be a dead leaf or to be a swift cloud or to be as in his boyhood.*
- *He use Romantic Rhetoric, he compares himself to Jesus Christ's Passion.*

2. *The second part of the poet's prayer (stanza V)*

- *He wishes to wind drives poet's thoughts over universe because actual society was not take into consideration.*
- *The poet wants to become one with the wind.*
- *Poet gives to wind a prophetic function.*

3. Shelley's language is highly figurative. Report below in stanza I the similes and metaphors you find. Which image prevails over the others and is used throughout the ode?

METAPHORS: Pestilence-stricken multitudes (v. 5)

Destroyer and preserver (v. 14)

SIMILES: (...) like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing (v. 3);

Each like a corpse within its grave (v. 8)

(...) like flocks to feed in air (v. 11)

4. The wind west is introduced as a natural phenomenon, but soon becomes a symbol. Its symbolic meaning affects the three worlds the ode combines: natural, social, personal.

1. What aspect of nature the ode describes

The ode describes many aspects of nature:

- in the first stanza we find the wild west wind destructive and conservative to the flora system, autumn with the presence of dead leaves and dried, the winter, the wind that carries the seeds and the spring season alive with the colours and smells; the life cycle of the leaves is compared to fevers, pestilence and human death;
- in the second stanza thunderstorms, storms and seas;
- in the third stanza the summer season with the blue Mediterranean;
- in the fourth stanza the wind speed;
- In the fifth stanza the forest and its leaves are falling.

2. What view of contemporary society it implies

The view of contemporary society is emerged by intuition and emotion over Enlightenment rationalism, the ideologies and events of the French Revolution.

3. What it reveals the poet

The poet reveals his inability to communicate with contemporary society and he trust to the blow of the wind.

Then explain in your own words what the west wind is a symbol of.

The West Wind is a portrayal of Shelley's rebellious motto towards the ideals and values during the Romantic era and his desire to escape from these customary beliefs reflected by the ways of nature.