

THE ODE AS A FIXED FORM



- **ORIGIN:** The Ode is a **fixed form of Greek origin**. It was meant to be sung in order to glorify or **celebrate** something or somebody. Like the ordinary lyric it was accompanied by instrumental music.
- **AUTHORS:** the greatest Greek writer of odes was Pindar. Also Horace, Foscolo and Oratio wrote important odes.
- **STRUCTURE:** It consists of 5 stanzas
- **STYLE:** **Direct address** and lofty language are its main features

THE TITLE OF THE ODE


- The title of the poem conveys the image of a strong wind that blows and brings hail and rain.
- The title's impact is reinforced by the **alliteration** of "w"

THE POEM AND THE CONTEXT

The poem, that has been written in 1819, actually belongs to the Romantic period **and is in tune with all the features of this period**. Many aspects can back-up this statement.



- **IDEALISM** - Shelley identifies the West Wind with a **universal forceful Spirit** that can clear the world and cause a "rebirth" that will remove inequalities and exploitation. Shelley also gives to the wind human traits, shaping it as a destroyer and preserver, as a beautiful and terrible being, in other words he sees in the wind the **sublime**.
 - "breath of Autumn's being", "Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere", "the impulse of thy strength[...], O uncontrollable!", "...to quicken a rebirth", "scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth Ashes and Sparks, my words among mankind!"
- **FRENCH REVOLUTION** - The poem is also influenced by the ideals of the **French Revolution**: the poet feels a great inner sense of freedom, of communion with Nature and he wants to destroy the old social order (which is part of a society that chains him) in the name of equality and fraternity.
 - "...tameless, and swift, and proud"

- **INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION** - The effects of the **industrial revolution** (industrial landscapes, polluted cities,...) is probably one of the main causes that encouraged artists to focus their attention on nature, considering it as a **living organic structure** and as a medium for conveying fundamental spiritual truths. The industrial revolution also caused great social unrest among the working class and the establishments always put down riots making troops charge people.
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- **STYLE** - Shelley's **style** is in tune with other romantic poets' way of writing: it includes a widespread **use of imagery**, symbolism and myth
 - For quotations, read the section "the function of personification"
 - **SHELLEY'S LIFE** - Shelley is a **committed artist**: he wants to change society. He, such as William Blake, sides with the poor and the weak.
 - "if Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?"

THE REAL EXPERIENCE THAT ORIGINATED THE ODE



A note tells us that Shelley was in **Florence** when he wrote the ode. His senses were hit by the violent storms that occur in autumn. He found thunders and lightning **sublime**.

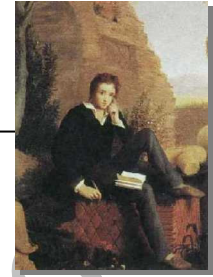
THE FUNCTION OF PERSONIFICATION



In the poem, Shelley moves from a realistic and concrete dimension to a metaphorical and universal one. In other words, the author keeps realistic elements, but personifies them: he makes them symbolic of something abstract or trait them as their actions were the result of an act of will. The author uses the realistic dimension **as a springboard to a symbolic dimension**. The personifications of the first stanza are arranged into the following list:

- **WEST WIND**: "thou breath", "autumn's being", "who chariotest", "wild Spirit", "destroyer and preserver"
- **DEAD LEAVES**: "ghosts", "hectic red", "pestilence-stricken multitude"
- **ZEPHYRUS**: "azure sister", "her clarion", "driving sweet buds"
- **HUES**: "living hues"

- **SEEDS:** “winged seeds”
- **COLD GROUND:** “dark wintry beds”
- **BUDS:** “buds like flocks”



THE POEM AND SHELLEY'S BIOGRAPHY

Because Shelley was a committed artist, there's a clash between his life and the 5th stanza, which shows us an **escapist attitude**.

THE ODE AND SHELLEY'S THEORETICAL WORK

The Ode to the West Wind and Shelley's *Defence of Poetry* are bound together because they share a number of images. For instance, in the critical essay, Shelley describes the process of composing a poem as a *fading coal* and an *inconstant wind*, and these graphic images can't but remember the *ashes and sparks* and the *Wild Spirit* of the Ode. Not only Shelley's poems convey feeling and ideas through the **massive use of the figures of speech**, but also his *Defence of Poetry* does. He claims that inspiration is like an evanescent visitation of the divine, that arrives and departs unbidden, but its footsteps “*are like those of a wind over the sea, which the coming calm erases, and whose traces remain only, as on the wrinkled sand which paves it*”.

THE ROLE OF THE POET

The poet should make the world feel in harmony, and to fulfil his aim he must act as the wind, which is considered the medium to establish a link with the invisible powers which govern the universe.

THE MAIN THREADS OF THE POEM

Main threads:

- **THE CONTRASTS** ==> life and death; autumn and spring; the Wild West Wind and the azure sister; “**destroyer**” and “**preserver**”...
- **THE ACTIONS OF THE WINDS:** “**driving sweet buds...**” (stanza 1) ==> “**drive my dead thoughts over the universe**” (stanza 4); “**her clarion over the dreaming hearth**” (stanza 1) ==> “**The trumpet of a prophecy**” (stanza4).



THE ODE AND THE POEM "OZYMANDIAS"

Both poems are characterized by an **intense use of graphic images** and the **contrast between Nature and establishment**. As a matter of fact, in *Ozymandias* Nature redresses what is wrong (eroding the celebrating statue of the pharaoh) and in the *Ode*, Nature destroys what is wrong and preserves what is necessary for the rebirth.

POETRY AND PAINTING

The ode, describing the movement of the wind that carries seeds and dead leaves and that passes through the forest, **suggest us the image of the vortex**. Many painters belonging to the romantic movement painted landscapes which did not have anything to do with the neoclassic harmony and balance and some of them **used to painted vortexes**.



J. Turner – *Snowstorm* (1842)
Oil on Canvas



J. Turner - *Landscape with Distant River and Bay* (1845)
Oil on canvas; Musee du Louvre, Paris



J. Turner – *Rockets and Blue Lights* (1840)
Oil on canvas;



J. Turner - *The Evening of the Deluge*, 1843
Oil on canvas; Tate Gallery, London

The Ode also suggests us **mobile skies**, such as those painted by John Constable.



J. Constable – *Golding Constable's garden* (1815)
Oil on canvas



J. Constable – *Brighton Beach* (19/7/1824)
Oil on canvas; Victoria and Albert Museum, London

NATURE AND THE ROMANTIC ARTISTS

In the romantic period, Nature plays a pivotal role in the arts. As a matter of fact, the artist who escapes from industrial polluted landscapes discovers Nature and is fascinated by its destructive power that overwhelms man. Romantic artists also consider Nature in a spiritual way and feel in communion with it.

HOW THE WHEEL OF COLOURS IS ORGANIZED

The graphic organizer I've used to analyse the Ode and to establish links with the cultural background it belongs to is structured in the way I'm going to make clear.

The background image of the "apple-pie map" is "Snowstorm" by J. Turner and stands for the whole Ode. I've chosen this image since **it shows us a vortex which reminds autumnal wild winds** that blow carrying dead leaves and dust, hence **it is symbolic of the Ode.**

Each sector stands for a point of entry we can develop in order to highlight a peculiar aspect of the poem. It is represented as a transparent shape because **it is a part of the poem**, but each of them is painted in a different colour because **they are bound to different points of entry.**

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