

World Literature II (Quiz 10)

"Ode to the West Wind"

1. How and to what extent would you apply Shelley's theories about inspiration and expression, about the powers of poetic language, to this poem?
2. Characterize the West Wind in this poem - what are its powers, what effects does it have on nature (or the other elements in nature) and the poet? In what way does it embody both danger and hope? How is the operation of Shelley's West Wind different from natural forces in Wordsworth (or Blake)?
3. What is the traditional purpose of an ode? What does it seem to be to romantics such as Shelley?
4. What assistance does the poet seek from the West Wind? Why has he been "striving" with the West Wind, unlike the forest, who is also the West Wind's "lyre"?
5. When towards the poem's end the speaker prays to the West Wind to scatter abroad his words and thoughts like dead leaves and ashes, what is he implying about poetic language? How does such a prayer relate to Shelley's ideas about inspiration and expression?
6. Is the speaker certain that the West Wind will grant the prayer that has been uttered? What is the task of the poem with regard to the reader and perhaps to the human community?

A Defence of Poetry

1. How does the common metaphor of the "Aeolian lyre" figure (790) in Shelley's theory about poetic inspiration and expression?
2. In his dialogue *Ion*, Plato makes Socrates argue that inspiration is a direct transmission of divine emotion from the poet to the reader or hearer. Is that the way inspiration works according to Shelley? Explain, with reference to his "fading coal" metaphor. Coleridge claims that the symbol bridges the gap between mind and matter, subject and object. How does Shelley's view of poetic language differ from Coleridge's? Nonetheless, how is it that poetry "purges from our inward sight the film of familiarity which obscures from us the wonder of our being" and "creates anew the universe"?
4. How does Shelley define the poet - what qualities does the poet have? Are his definitions of the poet based more on expressive capacity than on inspiration? Is there a conflict between claims about a poet's "inspiration" and claims about the social function of poetry? Why or why not?
5. As for the value of poets to the human community, why are they, according to Shelley, "the unacknowledged legislators of the world" and "the institutors of laws"? In other words, why and how can poets (and not ordinary judges and politicians) provide society with permanent laws?
6. In explaining why he thinks poetry is necessary to humankind, Shelley states that "we want the creative faculty to imagine that which we know." In what sense might this be an argument against the tendencies of science? Why, even beyond criticisms of science, do we "want" (i.e. "lack") the faculty that Shelley says is necessary - what is damaging the individual's well-being and disuniting the human community?