

The snow man by wallace stevens

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



Afterlife: the complete emptiness Wallace Stevens (1879–1955) wrote most of his poems during the world wars period, which took the lives of millions of people. As a result, Wallace Stevens started to question the importance of religion in the modern era, and felt that you should enjoy your life in the present and not waste time living for an afterlife. In his poem “The Snow Man”, Stevens describes a harsh winter environment creating a unique dramatic situation through an effective imagery. He leads the reader from a relatively objective description of a winter scene to a subjective emotional response.

Roberts Pack’s essay on “The Snow Man” discusses the idea of perception, while David Perkins while focuses on the relationship between imagination and reality through the perspective of the snow man. Is Wallace Steven concerned with imagination and reality, or perception? In “The Snow Man”, the atypical syntax and logic of the poem, as well as the usage of imagery, compels the reader to perceive the poem from an untraditional in order to both understand the role of nature and realize its very theme is death. The title of the poem “The Snow Man” is very confusing for the reader.

At first we “visualize balls of snow placed on top of each other, coals for eyes, a carrot nose” as Perkins implies, and don’t see the relation with the poem. But after a few readings we discover the snow man and the listener are one individual. The lines “One must have a mind of winter” (1. 1) and “And have been cold a long time”(2. 1) indicate in my opinion the listener is dead. Why so? Winter implies cold, and cold equals death. So if the snow man has a mind of winter, it means he is dead. The snow man is indeed an image to describe this dead body, which is recovered by ice and snow.

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It is also a symbol of the cycle of life, which always ends with death. Once spring is here, the snow man will melt, it won't last forever. Just like a dead body would decompose, and turn into dust. In fact, we get the sense that we are reading through the listener's mind. The first thing that is noticeable about the poem is that it is actually just one long, complex sentence, there is no rhyme, and each line has a different length. One question that may arise with is this: if the poem really was meant to imitate the mind's flow of thought, then why did Stevens write it in just one line instead of dividing it into five tercets?

Without this specific structure the poem would lose in mood and tone. The dramatic situation is set on a cold and quiet winter day, with very little movement in the surroundings. The poem itself should be the same, gentle and unhurried. This is achieved with the use of pauses after lines and stanzas. Because when someone dies his soul is liberated from the burdens of life. The fourth line of the poem gives it this mood and tone too. It provides a further slowing down with the use of one syllable words, and of assonance with the long " o" sound " cold/long", reinforcing the idea of the time passing and death.

We can divide the poem into two distinctive parts. The first part (from the beginning to half of the seventh line " Of the January sun"), correlates with the dead man losing all sorts of feelings because of the cold. The speaker describes the harshness off the environment surrounding the dead man. The words employed are very particular, achieving nuances which contribute to the vividness of the picture. For instance, the word " crusted"(1. 3) is used

instead of " covered," suggesting not only that it covers, but also the snow's firmness and roughness. We can assimilate the snow to the roots of a tree.

It is obvious that there is an accumulation of the " r" sound, as in " regard," " frost," " pine-trees", " crusted", " junipers", spruces", " rough", " glitter", and " January", adding vividness to the description. One particular image contained in these lines is that of the " distant glitter/ of the January sun" (2. 3/3. 1). The use of the sound " i" in assonance, support the idea that the sun is so distant, it has no effect. The enjambment and the separation of the phrase " of the January sun" into the next stanza, also relates this idea of distance. So even if the sun is visible in the sky, it doesn't play its true role: provide heat.

The speaker is almost saying he prefers darkness. The dead man losing his mind is the main subject of the second part (from and " not to think" to the end). The listener considers his self a snow man, enabling him to view the world through different eyes, and thus enables him to see the vivid little details of the scene, which he would not normally see. The dead man is leaving behind his own mind and assuming the snow man's mind, liberating him from any sufferance. This idea is supported by the word " think", emphasized by the enjambment " and not to think / of any misery"(3. -2). Therefore, it is clear these lines aim to appeal to the reader's sense of hearing. It contains multiple instances of the word " sound," as well as the words " listener" and " listen. " In addition, there also is a prevailing use of the sound " s" - " misery," " sound," " leaves," " same," " listener," " listens," and " snow", which mimics the hissing " sound of the wind"(3. 2). On top of

this, it is known that the absence of one sense contributes to the acuteness of another. In this instance, the dead man gives up his sense of sight, and tries listening instead of looking.

He is able to hear the normally soft, quiet " sound the wind", and " the sound of a few leaves"(3. 3). I think the speaker addresses the use of sound, because sound tells us a lot about our surroundings even if we don't use our vision. In our society sound enables us to communicate, and to lose this sense indirectly signifies we are as good dead. Another aspect of this process is the movement from something particular and small to something more vague and vast. The " boughs of pine-trees," " the junipers," and " the spruces" disappear to become " the same bare place", and " the sound of a few leaves" becomes " the sound of the land".

Along the poem, the dead man disregards his self. Slowly he loses his thought (death of the mind) and feelings (death of the body), then his sense's from sight to hearing are reduced, and finally loses his distinctiveness by assuming the snow man's mind. And, since the mind of a snow man is lifeless, the listener would ultimately become nothing, as stated in the 14th line " And, nothing himself". This idea of " being nothing" is, given importance by putting the phrase, " nothing himself" in the middle of the line instead of the beginning or end, and by the repetition of the word " nothing" in the last two lines.

The last line of the poem " Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is"(5. 3), the longest of it, is given more importance because it holds the key to Steven's message. The fricative " th" gives it an echoing sound. The line

starts with the word " behold" (it means to see) due to the use of the enjambment in line 14, which emphasises the message of this particular word. By combining the words " Behold" and " nothing", Stevens is saying the dead man, aka the " listener", is just sitting there dead and there is nothing, nothing to think about and nothing to do.

Even if the speaker does a concession in by opposing " is not there" vs " that is". The speaker is inducing there is nothing in the afterlife. In conclusion, " The Snow Man" is a poem about death, and the emptiness of the world. The dead man or the listener gradually loses his body, and then his mind to a snow man. The snow man is an image of the body in this cold environment. By assuming the mind of a snow man, he is condemning himself to disappear physically and mentally. Wrapping it up can be argued Wallace Stevens message is that there is no afterlife and there is no point in believing in religion.

It would be interesting to study how Stevens personal and professional life shaped his opinion on religion. Work Cited • Wallace, Stevens. " The Snow Man". The Columbia Anthology of AmericanPoetry. Jay Parini. New York. Columbia University Press. Page 310. Print. • Pack Robert. Wallace Stevens: An approach to his poetry and thought. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1958. Copyright © 1958 by Rutgers, The State University. • Perkins, David. A History of Modern Poetry: From the 1890s to the High Modernist Mode (Cambridge: HarvardU P, 1976), 542-544