

Edith wharton's ethan  
frome and wallace  
stevens' "the snow  
man" essay sample



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## **Edith Wharton's Ethan Frome and Wallace Stevens' "The Snow Man" Essay Sample**

Coldness is a prominent theme in both Edith Wharton's *Ethan Frome* and Wallace Stevens' "The Snow Man." When one thinks of coldness, the misery, the emptiness, and the lack of life associated with it also come to mind.

*Ethan Frome* and "The Snowman" show that the coldness of one's surroundings turns one cold and numb on the inside by taking away all feeling and imagination and leaves a person with nothing.

*Ethan Frome* is the story of a man's unfortunate life. It is set in the cold and dismal town of Starkfield in New England. The effect of the long winters is evident in all the townspeople. The narrator is "struck by the contrast between the vitality of the climate and the deadness of the community" (7). Even when the warm, effervescent months come along, they are not enough to melt the internal coldness of the people, especially *Ethan Frome*.

*Ethan's* life has some promise in the beginning when he was able to get away from the coldness of Starkfield; But his parents' illnesses bring him back and take away any chance of getting away. As more time passes, *Ethan* becomes more like the austere town of Starkfield. On one cold, snow filled night, the last thing keeping *Ethan* alive inside, *Mattie*, is permanently injured. Everything after that has no longer has any meaning to him. He is forever trapped in Starkfield and because he has "been in Starkfield [so] many winters", he becomes "a part of the mute melancholy landscape, an incarnation of its frozen woe, with all that was warm and sentient in him fast bound below the surface" (7, 13).

Just like Ethan Frome, the speaker of "The Snow Man" is taken over by the coldness of his surroundings. Slowly the coldness of winter seeps into the speaker and takes over his mind. After being in the frigid environment for too long, he can no longer see the beauty in the things around him. The physical coldness leads to an emotional coldness. The speaker's diction shows how his emptiness inside is projected onto the world. "For [he is] the listener, who listens in the snow, / And, nothing himself, beholds / Nothing that is not there and the nothing / that is." (Lines 13 - 16). The speaker is forever trapped in "the same bare place" (Line 12).

The environment changes people, especially cold areas. The "frost and the boughs... [and the] misery in the sound of the wind" start to take over and replace all that is represents life inside. (Lines 2, 8) Coldness slowly creeps over a person and consumes him or her from the inside out, leaving him or her with nothing except a feeling of emptiness.