

The street

Economics



In this excerpt from Ann Petry's *The Street*, the wind is the central antagonist. The narrator efficiently utilizes a third-person omniscient narrator to relay to the reader the bitterness of the cold, along with the adamant determination of Lutie Johnson. Through the use of chillingly descriptive imagery, and figurative language including resplendent personification, the narrator successfully conveys the perilous nature of the cold to enhance Lutie Johnson's temporal and sensory experiences. Imagery is certainly the most central literary device in this excerpt, as it gives the reader an accurate sense of the brutal cold that the protagonist has to endure in her search for a home. The omnipotence and omnipresence of the "Cold November Wind" (line 1) is evidenced in the sense of disorder and chaos that encompasses 116th street. "Scraps of paper" (line 9) are sent "dancing high in the air... into the faces of the people on the street.

(line 10) As if the annoyance of having garbage flying in one's face were not enough, the November wind aroused "all the dirt and dust and grime and lifted it up so that the dirt got into their noses...the dust got into their eyes and blinded them...The grit stung their skins." Petry's use of vivid imagery successfully illustrates the harrowing and painful nature of this seasonably inclement meteorological phenomenon. Figurative language also helps to bolster the idea of the menacing wind. A simile can be found on line 33: "...and the metal had slowly rusted, making a dark red stain like blood."

Personification plays a vital role in this excerpt. In this passage, the cold November wind is personified as an abusive, forceful man who does as he pleases with an obdurate disregard of the emotions and feelings of those subject to his actions and influences. The first example within the passage

that supports this assertion can be found in line 5, when the wind's merciless barrage is portrayed by the narrator as a " violent assault.

Petry takes her calamitous description of the wind a step further in lines 19-20. The wind is portrayed as insensitive as it " grabs.. hats, pries scarves from around.. necks, sticks its fingers inside..

coat collars, and blows coats away from...bodies. " The wind violates Lutie Johnson without even a bit of respect; as its icy, death-like fingers " touched the back of her neck, exposed the sides of her head. " (lines 23-24). At this point in the excerpt, the wind is essentially a sexual predator; preying on the unwilling and innocent victims within its path. Petry's use of personification establishes Lutie Johnson's dogged will and refusal to settle for anything less than she expects. Regardless of the wind's unyielding blowing, Lutie Johnson continues on in search of a three-room tenement. She refuses to even inquire towards a two-room establishment, despite the bone-chilling lashes of the cold November wind.

Lutie rests only when she finds an apartment suitable to her liking, and the sense of relief she feels at her successful resolution at the end of this excerpt is highlighted by the author's masterful use of imagery and vivid personification.