

Winter mood in 'the first snowfall' poem by james russell lowell

[Literature](#), [American Literature](#)



Without hesitation, everyone can agree that winter's beauty is unparalleled. However, with the rise of transcendentalism in early poetry, the season of winter was painted with a much darker hue, altering the perspective of winter in literature forever. As the snow gradually falls outside, the persona from "The First Snowfall" reminisces the passing of his daughter. James Russell Lowell's poem conveys a riveting message regarding the power of snow, and how it yields the ability to provoke both heartache and healing. In the poem, "The First Snowfall", by James Russell Lowell, a tonal shift from serenity to sorrow is created to support the poem's moral, through the integration of metaphor, simile, and personification.

To accentuate the melancholic and serene tones presented in the poem, the poet incorporates the literary device of metaphor. The persona explained, "I stood and watched by the window/The noiseless work of the sky," (Lowell, 13-14). Metaphor is used to emphasize the figurative meaning of the poem, the powerful connection between nature and mankind. Additionally, metaphor is applied by the poet to reintroduce the meaning of winter in literature, the season of death. "Flake by flake, healing, and hiding/The scar of our deep-plunged woe," the persona laments (Lowell, 31-32). The snow, as expressed by the persona, blankets their grief about the loss of their daughter. It can "heal and hide" the persona's desolation, which reminds them that the snowfall can bestow a feeling of agonizing nostalgia, and be a symbol of patience and love, two essential elements that can ultimately heal a traumatized heart (Lowell 31-32). Metaphor is used in the "First of Snowfall" to exemplify the tranquil and regretful tones expressed by the snow.

To indicate the significance of the persona's feelings about their loss, Lowell weaves the use of simile into the poem. The persona narrated the snowy scene, " How the flakes were folding it gently/As did robins the babes in the wood," (Lowell, 19-20). The sweet caress of the snow on the tombstone, erects feelings of peacefulness for the persona, as they are reminded of their daughter's death through the comparison of the piling snow to the love of a family. The speaker describes, " I remembered the gradual patience/That fell from the sky like snow," (Lowell, 29-30). The gentle yet " gradual" descent of snow, is compared to " patience", which has the power to lighten the pain experienced by the speaker (Lowell, 29-30). This, therefore, marks the beginning of the persona's prolonged journey of healing. James Russell Lowell uses a simile to further describe the serene tone present in the first five stanzas of his poem, " The First Snowfall".

To highlight the placid and mournful tones present in the poem, the poet uses personification. The persona describes the tranquil wintery scene as, " Every pine and fir and hemlock/Wore ermine too dear for an earl/And the poorest twig on the earl-tree," (Lowell, 5-7). Lowell gives human-like qualities to inanimate objects part of the scenery, elucidating that the trees were peacefully laden with thick layers of snow. The persona internally thought, "...of the leaden sky/That arched o'er our first great sorrow/When that mound was heaped so high," (Lowell, 28-29). Personified as being able to " arch over", the snowfall's magnificence makes the speaker feel that their problems are much smaller in comparison. James Russell Lowell uses personification to exemplify his transcendentalist views and elevate nature

to an equal level as humanity. The integration of personification further enhances and clarifies the tonal shift displayed in the poem from tranquility to melancholia.

The poem, “ The First Snowfall”, written by James Russell Lowell, has a tonal shift from serene to sorrowful, which is further enhanced by the poet’s use of metaphor, simile, and personification, to help visualize and experience the persona’s internal melancholia. The tonal shift helps convey the overarching message of the poem, regarding how snow can act as a foundation for heartache and healing. As winter approaches hastily, one should take into consideration the invigorating power of snow.