

# Through the eyes of a snow man

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



Mason Ochocki Through the Eyes of a Snow Man Many people have a very positive connotation with the word "snowman". For most, it summons memories of asking Mom for carrots or some spare buttons, and of rolling giant snowballs into a form that resembles a giant ant more so than an actual human being. Such is not the case with the Wallace Stevens poem, The Snow Man.

No warm and fuzzy feelings are recalled in a close reading of this single sentence poem. Here, the snowman functions as a metaphor of a metaphor, a device that seems to be frequently used in Romantic poetry. The snowman represents the "mind of winter", which relates to the abstract concept of true nothingness. Through the use of the image of the snowman, Stevens crafts a poem that deals with ideas of objectivity, human consciousness, and imagination versus reality. In this poem, questions are raised as to whether or not the speaker even believes humans to be a part of the wintry scene that makes up the surroundings, apart from what our own perceptions tell us. The poem begins with a deceptively simple description of a seemingly desolate winter landscape. The images, such as the "pine trees crusted with snow" and the "junipers shagged with ice", are creatively stirring, and manage to accommodate feelings of morose and possibly misery.

As the poem reads on, the reader is taken past the point of imaginative descriptions into a world of nothingness, as cold as the snowman himself. To truly understand the beauty of the winter scene, it is necessary, as the speaker implies, to view it through the eyes of the snowman. Actually, it even takes it a step further. Rather than viewing it through snowman's actual eyes, which are probably made of coal anyway, one must actually

become the snowman, which is, for all intents and purposes, an inanimate object. By doing this, one is stripped of everything that makes them different from this man made of snow. All outside influence evaporates, and the reader is thrown into a world where they can be completely objective. The winter scene is expanded, and the cold no longer causes any diversion from normalcy.

It is here where the reader can hear all of the sounds of the wintry scene. Stevens makes almost excessive use of the “s” sound in words such as “snow”, “listens”, and “listener”. It is also found in the word “sound” itself on three occasions, and the word “same” on two. It seems that in this poem, the pronoun “one” refers to the speaker, almost as if he is identifying himself as any or every person. Having the mind of winter is to have the mind of the snowman. Winter can be seen as exactly as it is, with no internal or external influence, and with no imaginative prospects. It is only this way that the speaker can literally see “nothing that is not there”, but also, the tangible “nothing that is”.

This, in my opinion, relates to the concept of objectivity. Objectivity is defined by Webster as “judgment based on observable phenomena and uninfluenced by emotions or personal prejudices”. In his own mind, the speaker would hear “misery in the sound of the wind”. This is because the speaker has real human emotions and imagination that causes him to attach feelings to the scene that don’t necessarily exist there. In the mind of the snowman, however, there is nothing more than “the sound of the land, full of the same wind, that is blowing in the same bare place. But, it also must be

said that maybe the snowman sees nothing and feels nothing only because he is nothing himself. In the same way that the human mind projects its own emotions onto the world around it, the unconscious snowman leaves it empty, because his reality is no reality at all.

Reading through this poem, one cannot help but to think about the concept of true nothingness. Stevens touches upon it by referring to “ the nothing that is”, but it seems as though it is part of a much greater idea. From a rational standpoint, one would assume that “ nothing” is merely the absence of “ something”. In this poem, however, nothing is something tangible. It is something that exists within the world of the snowman and it cannot be ignored. This leads to the conclusion that true nothingness, as a concept, cannot really exist. The human race exists in a universe where what is perceived with senses and basic instinct is the only thing that can be relied upon.

The limits of reality are largely unknown to anyone, and therefore ruling out any possibilities would be irrational. In order for true nothing to actually exist, it can't exist. How does one differentiate the nothing to be, from the nothing that never was? It would seem, in large part, that the speaker is pondering this question while looking at a snowman. The existence of an actual snowman within the poem is debatable, as it might just be a clever metaphor evoked by the title. Either way, it doesn't really affect the meaning, just the image that comes to mind when reflecting on the scene. This may be because it is worth noting that the poem's title is “ The Snow

Man". This is interesting because, typically, the word "snowman" is one word and not two.

This would suggest that it isn't really referring to a mock human sculpture made out of large snowballs, but rather an actual man standing in the open snow. In the Cormac McCarthy novel *The Road*, there is a very memorable quote that reads, "Not all dying words are true". What this means is that situations are, for the most part, irrelevant—that no matter what the circumstances, one must still be aware and conscious of the fact that human error is inevitable. The poem seems to elaborate on this in many aspects. The snowman can never be dishonest, because he can only accept things exactly as they are. The snowman has no ulterior motives, no emotions, and no ways to possibly reflect what he has learned upon his surrounding environment. Having a "mind of winter" allows one to be like the snowman.

Without the capacity for imagination, the scene exists exactly as it is, if at all. With imagination, the landscape is skewed. It presents infinite possibilities for interpretations, exaggerations, and falsifications. This is the point where absolute truth cannot exist in a world where humans can't determine the full extent of nature's role in their reality. "The junipers shagged with ice, (and) the spruces rough in the distant glitter" provide thought-provoking imagery that is both moving and powerful. It presents a world of interpretation and re-interpretation that only a human mind can comprehend. The snowman, however, is presented with none of these options.

He has no mind, and therefore he has a greater capacity for truth than a real person ever can. Being like the snowman allows one to appreciate the serene beauty of the scene without thinking about the effects it will have on them. The human condition is meaningless to a snowman, and therefore, if he is to die out in the cold, his dying words will be nothing but the utmost truth. The Snow Man by Wallace Stevens is a poem that can be interpreted in a vast amount of ways. It is only a single sentence, and yet, it says so much. It is just short and vague enough to mean different things to almost anyone who reads it, yet long and illustrated enough that these interpretations can be elaborated upon and put into practice. By using the image of the snowman, Stevens manages to create a poem that deals with concepts of objectivity, human perception, and deep concepts of created imagination and reality.

Would an actual “ mind of winter” be able to take anything from this poem at all, or would it just accept it for what it is on the surface? It seems that the answer lies within the snowman, who will forever remain unspoken.