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ON POETIC SOVEREIGNTY AND ONTOLOGICAL AUTHENTICITY: WALLACE STEVENS'S "THE SNOW MAN"

عن السيادة الشعرية والأصالة الأنطولوجية:
قصيدة "رجل الثلج" لوالاس ستيفنز

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الملخص:

يتناول هذا المقال قصيدة رجل الثلج "The Snow Man" المنشورة ضمن مجموعة هارمونيوم (1923) للشاعر والاس ستيفنس كمثال على سعي ستيفنس لتحقيق وكالة شعرية و رمز للبحث الأنطولوجي للتصالح مع وجود تم اكتشاف جوفه في ضوء التحقيقات المعرفية. فبالاستناد الى ميتافيزيقية مارتن هايديجر في الوجود و الزمن (1927)، فكرة امتلاك "عقل شتوي" هو سعي ضمن فلسفة هايديجر للصدق الوجودي و محاولة للتخلص من مخالب "داس مان" التي تجليها تأثيرات الرومنسية و توغل البايلو حديثية. وتمثل "العقل الشتوي" تحمل القلق في مواجهة حالة غربية خالية من الوجود القدسي و الفهم الدنيوي. كما يشدد هذا البحث ختاما على براعة القصيدة في مزج ما يبدو أنه رحلة شخصية للشاعر مع مواضيع تلامس القيم العالمية و تمس بالسؤال البدائي المتعلق بالوجود.

الكلمات المفتاحيّة: ستيفنس، هايديجر، الوجودية، رجل الثلج.

Abstract:

This paper peruses upon Wallace Stevens's "The Snow Man," published as part of the Harmonium (1923) collection, as a Neomodernist poem representative of Stevens's striving for poetic agency and an allegory of the ontological quest to reconcile with an existence discovered to be hollow in light of thorough gnoseological inquiries. Drawing exclusively from Martin Heidegger's metaphysics in Being and Time (1927), this paper propounds the idea that having a "mind a winter," an imperative for survival in the poem, is a Heideggerian quest for authenticity and an attempt to disentangle from the throes of Das Man made manifest by the influence of Romanticism and the encroachment of Paleomodernism. "A mind of winter," in addition, is the endurance of angst in the face of an uncanny condition bereft of divine presence and worldly comprehension. Ultimately, this paper stresses the poem's mastery in blending what seems to be the poet's personal journey with themes that brush with the universal and touch upon the primordial question of what it means to Be..

Keywords:

Stevens, Heidegger, ontology, The Snow Man.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Literary movements are typically deemed to be products of the age in which they flourish and reactionary voices of the movements that preceded them. Wallace Stevens, as part of the Modernist trend, is a poet whose legacy endures as a testament to the pursuit of authenticity through the creation of a medium that favours the voice of inner-sense, an undertaking that sets him apart from the Paleomodernists whose view of originality came to mean the recourse to restorationalist methods consisting of the resuscitation of canonical texts, as crystallised in the poetry of Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot. Stevens's poem "The Snow Man" could be regarded as one of the "reactionary" voices in terms of its rejection of both Romantic solipsistic fervour along with Paleomodernism's restitutionist disposition, and a representation of the ontological maelstrom that swept the era in which the poem was written. This paper seeks to argue in favour of these three statements, relying upon Heideggerian metaphysics as its theoretical foundation. Because the quest for authentic Being is the highlight of his philosophy, Heidegger's mode of thought provides material insight to this paper. Before launching the discussion, the supply of an account regarding the context surrounding the Modernist movement is of salience insofar as "The Snow Man" echoes the existential despair of an era "buried" in what felt like Popean "universal darkness."

1.1 Acknowledging the Broader Context

Modernism is a movement born out of extenuating, if not exceptional, circumstances. Indeed, as far as the dawn of the electric century is concerned, sorrows did *de facto* come in battalions, for it was a time that bore witness to the e*n masse* disenchantment with eschatological, epistemological, and logocentric narratives. To proclaim the loss of faith in the twentieth century Western societies to be the corollary of two grisly wars would be an understatement. While there is veracity to the claim that the absence of transcendental intervention in mitigating the senseless bloodshed incurred by the two great wars was a trigger for a wave of apostasy (Kern, 2017), the demise of faith displayed by some Modernists is more of a denouement spawning from a long process of spiritual corrosion. The Renaissance Humanist aspiration to place Man, rather than God, at the centre of the world and to designate him as the primary object of intellectual inquiry resulted in the discovery that neither Man nor God was at the centre. This realisation was brought by a shift in the perception of the universe along with the position humans occupy in it in light of the Copernican

planetary system whose heliocentric breakthrough refuted the long held belief in the centeredness of the earth (Schmidt, 1986, p. 52) and shook loose the foundation that the cosmos operated under providential harmony.

Additionally, the Enlightenment adherence to empiricism stipulated the grounding of modes of investigation within the confines of sensory perception, thereby disregarding the authoritative status of Scriptures as a source of guidance (Hill, 2003, p. 3) and prioritising instead experiences that can be discerned through sentience. By immanentising the scope of inquiry, the essence of God was recognised ineffable by the Enlightenment thinkers, and theistic creed fell subordinate to deistic thereof (p. 4) wherein divine interference with the tangible realm was ruled highly unlikely. Biblical discourse was already undermined by the burgeoning prevalence of empiricism, but most anthropologists unanimously agree that Darwin's biological breakthrough regarding Mankind's origins was what delivered the *coup de grace* to the Christian faith. When the Darwinian proclamation that Mankind was the product of evolution rather than transcendental creation began to gain momentum amongst the scientific *cognoscenti*; suffice to say the "dry divinities" fell into desuetude. By the time the twentieth century announced its arrival, faith had already fallen out of fashion amongst Westerners, the horrors of the two wars only ossified the sense of cosmic aloneness that seemed to be the defining characteristic of the human condition. Modernist artists were confronted with this spiritual hollowness stemming from the demise of eschatology.

Although science was declared the new religion, the prospect of understanding reality objectively and unravelling the "truths" of the universe was far from ever being fulfilled. In his epistemological rendering *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), the Prussian thinker Emmanuel Kant stressed the intrinsic duality of the world as it is—noumenon—and the way it is perceived by the human mind— phenomenon. This gap, according to Kant, is mediated through the mind's imposition of "rational categories" in an attempt to "order" its understanding of the surrounding environment (Granston, 1985, p. 28). If the human ability to grasp what it perceives is always processed through conceptual confines, there can be no wholly objective truth, meaning that though the new faith was predicated upon tangible matter, resolving life's persistent questions, *mutatis mutandis*, remained as far-fetched as ever.

The age of faithlessness and aporia witnessed the demystification of logocentric narrative as well. For millennia, language was held to a mystical standard, deemed by many a God-given courtesy with which Mankind is set to articulate its understanding of itself and of the observable phenomena to which it is exposed. However, theories of structuralism which asserted themselves as the *zeitgeist* of the era impugned this "superstition." In his posthumously collected lectures titled *Cours de Linguistique Générale* (1916), Ferdinand De Saussure revolutionised the perception of language by setting at defiance the misconception that it was "immutable" and divine, arguing instead that human language is a mere "evolving system of arbitrary signs" with no *a priori* connection to reality. Indeed, the relation entertained by the material objects and the syntax that categorises and orders them is, as it turns out, one of arbitrariness (Giles, 1993), to wit, there is no inherent connection between the signifier and the signified. Language was revealed to be a construct of the referential world, and not a mirror reflecting faithfully nature (Davis & Jenkins , 2015, p. 8). In short, the twentieth century was struck with the collective realisation that religion, fields of knowledge, and language were all anthropocentric constructs; all forms of meaning being human designs. It was an unprecedented time that warranted a movement whose trajectory sought to radically eddy out from previous ones.

1.2 The Poundian Shift: Ezra Pound's Outcry "Make it New"

The Modernist movement came to the forefront as an alternative to conventional systems of belief, its motto was "aesthetic heroism," and its motive consisted of "saving" a world perceived as "fallen" and in disarray (Eyteinsson, 2018, p. 9). Given the particularity of the *weltgeist*, the quest for aesthetic originality was declared *the cheval de bataille*. Ezra Pound's slogan "Make it New" became "the founding impetus for the literature of the period" (Goldman, 2004, p. 1) and a synecdoche covering artistic experimentalism in both form and content, iconoclasm in terms of its stance toward the politico-economic *status quo*, and poetic revolt, particularly against both Romantic and Victorian poetics (Pietrzak, 2011, p. 1).

The ideal of newness received a polarised reaction in the United States and set in motion two trends of Modernism, Paleomodernism and Neomodernism, a dichotomy inspired by the scholarship of literary critic Frank Kermode. The Paleomodernists resigned themselves to the act of foraging through the relics of a "glorified" yore to amass "heaps of broken images" (Eliot, The Waste Land and Other Poems, 2003, p. 27) in the hope that they may give "a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" (Eliot,

Ulysses, Order, and Myth, 1923). Neomodernists, on the other hand, sought to distance from this "Eurocentric" approach, advocating instead "nativism" and "American localism" (Armstrong, 2005, p. 33). Stevens is often ensconced within the latter category. His distaste for Romantic subjectivity, estrangement from Christianity, and resolution to contrive a confrontational dynamic between reality and imagination exemplified in both his poetry and prose account for the label of Neomodernist assigned to him.

Stevens's poetic singularity and his resolve to disengage from tradition have been a source of scholarly interest, particularly in regards to the selected poems of his first published pamphlet *Harmonium* (1923). His poem "Anecdote of the Jar," for instance, is deemed a commentary on Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" in which Stevens alludes to Keats mainly to broach the predicament of the American artist who does not identify with the Eurocentric cultural tradition. His poem "Sunday Morning," additionally, has been lauded for its subtle partiality toward a life devoid of celestial servitude (Surette, 2008, p. 113), and "Domination of Black" is considered a riveting representation of the "constant interchanging" of thingly reality and imagination's striving to "collate the disparity of thingly objects into a unified image" (Pietrzak, 2011, p. 152). However, the poem "The Snow Man" has been "underappreciated" in terms of the ontological insight it offers.

Many scholars have placed an emphasis upon "The Snow Man" as a poem of an imagination suspended when confronted with a sterile plain (Pietrzak, 2011, p. 186), and one that probes the necessity to be an individual of snow in order to resist nostalgia when contemplating bygones (Vendler, 1984, p. 48). Other critics, from their end, have discussed the "existential attunement" (Tan, 2023, p. 73) the poem evinces as part of an overall endeavour to perform a Heideggerian exegesis on Stevens's poetry. Having "a mind of winter," according to Tan, implies the perception of the observable realm as it is and the relinquishing of the temptation to subjectively outline the "external space[s]" (p. 71). As for Stevens's concluding lines, Tan contends the "nothing" stands for the "abysmal foundation" of the being of the landscape's objects (p. 72). However, his recognition that the final lines stand as a "site of illumination" of the inextricable interconnectedness of Nothing and Being (p. 73) does not extend to consider that this site is also one of potential *poiesis* and that illumination can serve as a gateway for reconciliation with and adaptation to this usurping nothingness.

The scope of literature perusing upon "The Snow Man is vast, but by no means complete. In addition to the material aforementioned works, Sebastian Gardner's "Wallace Stevens and Metaphysics: The Plain Sense of Things" (1994) and Simon Critchley's *Things Merely Are*: *Philosophy in the Poetry of Wallace Stevens* (2005) provide a solid backbone in their interpretations of the poem as a portrayal of a reality devoid of constructs and absent in imagination. This paper consolidates the already existing exegeses and goes a step further to suggest that "The Snow Man" is at once representative of Stevens's arduous resolve not to inherit the legacies of his predecessors but it is also evocative of the fundamental question of what it means to "Be" that inevitably and universally presses upon the consciousness when undergoing the process of individuation. In this sense, "The Snow Man" alludes to the poet's quest to endure the discomfort of emmewing imagination within the contours of the tangible fabric by reducing it to the "first idea" while also serving as an allegory for the ontological need to re-evaluate the trajectory of one's life and decide where to go from there and whether or not to follow a collective thoroughfare or steer a more authentic course, a need experienced by 20th Century Westerners who had to grapple with the crumbling metanarratives while desperately attempting to find meaning in their existence.

2. Method: A Heideggerian Approach

Given the concomitance of his thought with the context around which "The Snow Man" is written, this paper relies on Heidegger's ontological insights, particularly the ones provided in his philosophical treatise *Sein und Zeit* (Being and Time) (1927). Heidegger probes that there are two ways of Being, authentic and inauthentic. Reaching a state of authenticity, and even then, upholding it requires a commitment to a process of striving that may know no end, for Heidegger defines lived experience in a new light. Heidegger refers to the Being of humans as Dasein to emphasise the "ontico-ontological" aspect of human existence as distinguishable from that of other ontic entities—non-human organisms—whose being, unlike that of Dasein, is not "an issue for it." This ontico-ontological" particularity, argues Heidegger, characterises humans' Being (Dasein) as one burdened with the awareness of their inevitable mortality and bedevilled with the restlessness of seeking "answers" and some form of understanding that can either account for their timed stay or bestow upon it a shred of significance.

He goes on to chronologise Dasein as a condition whose existence is the result of having been "thrust" into an environment (*geworfenheit*) wherein an order has already been established (*Das Man*) and in which Dasein is typically absorbed, particularly in its mundane everydayness (*Verfallen*) ultimately leading to a fractured self (they-self) in which one's Being is inauthentic on account of living according to "the they's" dictates rather than following one's own terms (*Verfallenheit*). "The they" is the convoluted web of environmental network that entraps Dasein in a state of rut where both actions and thoughts are enacted with a listlessness that does not fully exploit the potential of its "ontico-ontological" aspect in providing authentic choices. The act of living is circumscribed to a series of "prescribed" steps that commission "what can and may be ventured" (p. 165). This state of inauthenticity embroils Being in a mode of "distantiality," "averageness," and "levelling down" wherein the self is given only "proximally" to itself (p. 166) and consequently "everyone is the other, and no one is himself" (p. 165).

Remaining in this state of "groundlessness" can be "tranquilising" as it disarms Dasein from the urgency of claiming agency over its Being by subsuming it into the mouldings of "the they" (p. 222). Only through experiencing a visceral sense of "anxiety" (angst) that discloses to Dasein the inherent uncanniness (*unheimlicheikt*) of its existence, wrings it out of the familiarity of its everydayness, and posits it in an existential frame (p. 233) can the trajectory of Dasein take an authentic turn. Heidegger's ontology is instrumental in the study of Stevens's poem for a miscellany of reasons; his insistence on the necessity to relentlessly pursue authenticity by striving against the confines of *Das Man* resonates with the Stevensian Neomodernist undertaking that resists the influence of both the past and the present through the maintaining of a "mind of winter" exemplified in the poem. The Heideggerian notions of anxiety in the face of the *unheimlich* are also applied to showcase that Stevens's resolve to endure the "miseries" of his insidious time can also be regarded as an attempt to reconcile with the inherent unanswerability of Being. Nothingness, relevant to Heidegger and ostensibly to Stevens as well as displayed in the concluding lines of his poem, is interpreted as a liminal space where Stevens confronts the said unanswerability poetically and existentially.

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3-DISCUSSION AND RESULTS:

Stevens's opening lines of his poem declaring that "one must have a mind of winter / To regard the frost and the boughs / of the pine crusted with snow" have been interpreted as "the first idea" or "the primary season" (Gardner, 1994, p. 326) in which imagination is frozen and reality is sterile (Pietrzak, 2011, p. 186) and from which Stevens starts his Neomodernist poetic project to "free poetical imagination from the automatism of past generations" (Bartczak & Macha , 2018, p. 144). Indeed, the very title "The Snow Man" is deemed an exhortation to cease being flesh and blood and to become instead an individual of snow in order to resist any longing for the "return" to the "passed joy[s]" (Vendler, 1984, p. 48).

A mind of winter betokens also the adoption of a cryophilic disposition impervious to Romantic temperament. When Stevens portrays the pine trees as "crusted" with snow, the junipers "shagged" with ice, and the spruces "rough," he isn't just delineating a bare reality, he is also limning a landscape that does not offer the spiritual solace otherwise attributed to nature by the Romantics. Nature was perceived as the *heimat* by the *Jenaer Kreis*, hailed by the continental Romantics as a site of potential metanoia and spiritual regeneration (Granston, 1985, p. 16), and venerated by the Transcendentalists as a space where the right to sovereignty is not violated (Gilmore, 1985, p. 40). The mysticisms ascribed to nature by the Romantics grew into a monolithic legacy left for their successors—the Modernists—to inherit. Stevens's confrontation to nature is one of Dasein exposed to the morass of *Das Man*, as a poet he is exposed to a world imbued with labels assigned by other poets pertaining to movements with which he does not wish to identify, and his endeavour is to disengage from the encroachment of a homogenising force scourging his ipseity.

Heidegger contends that since Dasein operates in an environment that is by default a network of references, it inevitably at some point is subsumed into a collective current from which it is difficult to pull away. "Dasein dissolves . . . in such a way, indeed, that the Others, as distinguishable and explicit, vanish more and more. In this inconspicuousness and unascertainability, the real dictatorship of the they is unfolded . . . We . . . see and judge . . . as they see and judge" (Heidegger, 1927, p. 22). It is a universal commonality, and to Heidegger an ontological tragedy, to perceive the circumambient world from spectacles that are not custom-made, to carry the deadweight of legacies enacted by someone else, and to fall into a state of somnolent osmosis when subscribing to the dictates of the surrounding *umfeld*. Existence, more often than not, becomes an act of second-hand. To be a poet, to "legislate the world,"

means to reclaim the self otherwise enmeshed in the throes of "the they" by disburthening it from what has been bequeathed to give space to a voice true to its impressions and averse to vicarious experience.

Stevens, much like any Modernist, found himself confronted with a binary opposition that grew into a default setting, the demonisation of urban spaces as godless dystopias and the mystification of the wilderness as exalted soil wherein the Absolute manifests. Though faith was growing moribund, the divine remained the sighed Holy Grail, and god was likely to be found in the parts of nature that were unalloyed by the coal-tainted hands of industrial Man. The Ruskian idea that technological progress jeopardised nature's divine essence (Löwy & Sayre , 2001, p. 137) entailed a dualistic mode of reasoning amongst poets, the Romantics mostly, that demonised urbanism while deifying the landscape. Stevens, from his end, had no taste for the *outre-tombe* callings; his portrayal of nature is therefore to be distinguished from that of Romantics.

Indeed, against what William Blake famously deplored as the "dark satanic mills" of the Industrial Revolution and the usurpation of urbanism, nature offered a safe haven, but the Romantics' appropriation of it as a repository of transcendent effects had become of such influence that perceiving it outside these frames would denote a drastic departure from an idea grown into an axiom. When Stevens decides to confront the scenery with a mind of winter, he is not simply "freezing" his imagination, he is also forsaking solipsistic etherisation characteristic of Romanticism, and by deadening the landscape, he is removing the "transcendent effects" and demystifying it as devoid of divinity with no promise of numinous gratification. The contrast so vividly drawn by Romantics such as Rousseau and François-René of godless urban cities in opposition with the ineffably ethereal atmosphere of non-Industrial areas is rejected by Stevens, for to him it is all one "land" blowing "the same wind" in "the same bare place." Stevens's confrontational position crystallised in his resolve to attune to the drizzling weather sets him apart from the Romantic tradition whose subjectivity, solipsism, and escapism warped this barrenness, and betokens his inclination to take a more authentic direction of perception.

He is also distancing himself from the burgeoning trend of Paleomodernists whose artistic aspirations consisted of evoking former movements to produce an art that is a mosaic of literary relics. Standing before the dawn of an age so inauspicious in terms of prospects, encumbered with a sense of malaise against "an unstable present that, less and less, has a meaningful connection with authentic selfhood and authentic

memory," it is unsurprising that many Modernist artists resorted to "the process of return" (Perl, 1984, p. 30). To paleomodernists, establishing a continuum with past traditions—mainly European—alleviates the sense of alienation that swept the twentieth century Western societies by setting them as part of a larger body, but the vicissitudes of the age were unparalleled in their scope to anything ever witnessed before which makes Stevens's stonewalling of both Romanticism and Paleomodernism an acknowledgment of his age, an adherence to his American roots, and an affirmation of individuality.

Interestingly enough, having a mind of winter requires the adherence to a state of profound contemplation where the poet subsists upon three imperatives: "to regard," "to behold," and "not to think / of any misery . . ." Engaging with a reality so sapless without mollifying its grazing edges suggests the adoption of a state of "self-abnegation" that is recalcitrant to project subjective impressions upon the landscape, particularly through the constraint of both imagination and language. Since the barrenness of winter exposes the world as habitable only through the "illusory" anthropic constructs assigned to its phenomena, constructs spawning from a series of projecting and mythologising (Gardner, 1994, p. 326), the act of suspending this activity of assigning meaning to what meets the eyes is achieved through the sparsity of language. Articulation falls subordinate to the act of regarding and beholding.

Stevens's semantic austerity permits him to maintain a sobriety of mindset vis-à-vis the scenery standing before him. As a poet the way he wields language is dissimilar to that of a non-poet inasmuch as poetic language, from a Heideggerian prism, possesses the *sui generis* ability to detemporalise the "linguistic structures of intelligibility" whose mediation of thought and experience is limited within the parameters of "the epoch's particular understanding of Being" to reach toward a state of discernment that is more primordial (Watts, 2011, p. 163). From this choice to abstain in terms of terminology in order to ponder beyond the scenery, it can be inferred that Stevens wishes to bring to light a matter more pressing to be considered.

When Stevens concludes his poem with the lines "For the listener, who listens in the snow, / And nothing himself, beholds / Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is" it becomes clear that the poet has been building up for this moment, bracing himself for the "nothingness" through the sustainment of a mind of winter. Being an individual of snow with a mind of winter facing an unmalleable nothingness equates the act of withstanding some kind of hardship without succumbing to despair. In this vein, Stevens's poem takes an allegorical turn that confers upon the notion of "mind of

winter" an additional layer of meaning. The niveous scenery represents the inherent uncanniness of the world in which Dasein finds itself thrown, and the mind of winter is the poet's coping mechanism to the angst of facing this "truth" in all its nakedness. Gradually the poem dispenses with the preconceptions of the past, it dismisses the Romantic perception of Nature as a bastion of theopathic stimulation, distances itself from Paleomodernist referential coatings, and it reinforces the no-escapist and confrontational position through unbedizened language that captures the alertness and resoluteness to see eye to eye to what unfolds before it. This denudation undertaking makes "The Snow Man," as scholar Vendler volubly pointed, a resident of an unfamiliar sphere where the only visible object is the snow (p. 49).

This unfamiliarity is what constitutes the sense of *unheimlichkeit* that characterises Dasein's angst. Heidegger defines the *unheimlich* as the unhomelike, and to be bedevilled by angst or anxiety is to feel not-at-home (p. 233) because familiarity is established through collective sense-making, anxiety individualises one's Being (p. 236), thereby fragmenting the familiar. Not only does the poem gratuitously dwell on this state of *unheimlichkeit* triggered by anxiety, but it also develops immunity (mind of winter) to hold space for and be present with the sense of angst instead of attempting to flee it. Anxiety arises when all aspects of familiarity are removed from the picture, and the world is exposed in its indifferent unhomelike character:

> That which anxiety is anxious about is Being-in the world itself. In anxiety what is environmentally ready-to-hand sinks away, and so, in general, do entities within-the-world. The 'world' can offer nothing more . . . . Anxiety thus takes away from Dasein the possibility of understanding itself, as it falls, in terms of the 'world' and the way things have been publicly interpreted. (p. 232)

Stevens's mind of winter emblematises the angst he is willing to endure in his quest for poetic sovereignty. He achieves a state of "self-abnegation" (Vendler, 1984, p. 49) when he becomes "nothing himself" affronting what seems like nothingness stretching *ad infinitum*. As a poet, nothingness represents a fertile void, a potentiality for authentic Being, a liminality in which Stevens's imaginative workings gestate, and a "space of cognitive remapping," particularly as the intrinsic absence of logos in reality is laid bare (Bartczak & Macha , 2018, p. 165). Indeed, Stevens speaks for an entire generation throughout the poem, the desublimation of Nature is an almost apostate stance where the divine is consigned to disregard, a sentiment many of his contemporaries share. His disinclination to upholster the reality around him is also a radicalised neo-Kantian epistemological scepticism in which nothing can be named for

what it is, and whatever name it is given cannot encompass its essence by dint of language's limits. Overall the poem offers space for the recognition of the political climate of half a century riddled with tragedy and cosmic incomprehension.

The premise of the poem also carries ontological weight. Besides the Stevensian odyssey for poetic authenticity, the poem is metonymic of the human condition. The idea that the first half of the poem is predicated upon the necessity to batten down one's hatches for survival only to conclude that the scourge from which to survive is "nothingness" strikes as an anti-climax. However, this nothingness stands as the manifestation of the inherent unanswerability of Being. In his philosophical treatise, Heidegger sets the seal upon investigating the primordial question "what does it mean to be?" but he reaches no definitive answer. In that vein, Stevensian nothingness declares in bold that existence is underwhelmingly anticlimactic. To have a mind of winter means to endure the ontological trial that existence is an *in media res* condition because its origins remain unaccounted for, its finiteness is irreversible, and there is no teleological comfort in consuming one's saeculum, not when all eschatological considerations of an afterlife have been forsaken. "The nothingness that is not there" is the intrinsic absence of meaning lurking underneath anything perceivable, oneself included, and "the nothingness that is" is the meaninglessness that persists even when an attempt at understanding has been made by none other than the observer who is "nothing himself." The poem therefore serves as a gestalt covering two quests, one of poetic authenticity and the other of ipseity.

4- CONCLUSION:

"The Snow Man" is a poem that mirrors Stevens's raw combat to gauge the world around him for himself without riding on his predecessors' coattails. The poem is also a by-product of its tumultuous context, the stillness of the landscape echoes the absence of the divine, the parsimony in terminology is a Saussurean disillusionment with the eligibility of language to give what is experienced proper justice, and the very reluctance to define or explain is an act of yielding to the inherent impenetrability of noumena. Above all, the poem is a summary of the human condition, thrust into an unfamiliar stage from which it seeks to wrest meaning and upon which it projects a purpose, but all for nought because the most fundamental questions of Being remain unanswered and underneath the arbitrary meaning and projected purpose, nothingness reigns supreme.

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