

Poetic Alleviation from Turmoil: A Critical Analysis of Wallace Stevens' Selected Poems

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Abstract

This research delves into the therapeutic dimensions of Wallace Stevens' poetry, exploring how his imaginative use of cultural and natural imagery contributes to mental relief, contemplation of reality, and the exploration of alternative perspectives. Four poems, namely "Disillusionment of Ten O'clock," "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," "Sunday Morning," and "The Snow Man," serve as focal points for analysis. The methodology involves an in-depth examination of each poem's unique features, followed by a comparative analysis that highlights shared themes and distinctive qualities. Through a synthesis of findings, the study aims to explore how Stevens' diverse poetic techniques may provide solace and fresh perspectives in the face of life's challenges. The poems reveal a common thread in their emphasis on the role of imagination in navigating the complexities of existence. Themes of detachment from conventional norms, the liberating power of questioning, and the relationship between nature and mental tranquillity permeate these verses. Drawing from lines such as "What is the white that keeps appearing?" and "It was evening all afternoon", the analysis underscores the therapeutic potential of Stevens' poetry, encouraging readers to embrace diverse perspectives and engage in imaginative contemplation. The findings of the study are expected to contribute to the broader discourse on the intersection of poetry and mental well-being, shedding light on how Stevens' work remains a timeless source of inspiration and solace.

Keywords: Wallace Stevens, poetry, mental relief, imagination, alternative perspectives

1. Introduction

In the tapestry of American poetry, Wallace Stevens stands as a luminary figure, weaving threads of cultural and natural imagery into the fabric of his verses. His work, a testament to the vibrant landscapes of both his native surroundings and the rich expanse of his imagination, transcends the confines of conventional literary movements, offering readers a profound and multifaceted lens through which to view the complexities of existence. This critical exploration ventures into the therapeutic dimensions of Stevens' poetry, delving deep into its capacity to serve not merely as an artistic expression but as a source of mental relief for those grappling with the intricacies of life. Stevens' life narrative is emblematic of the very duality that permeates his poetry—a delicate dance between the ostensibly mundane existence in the northeastern United States and the enchanting realms of his imagination (Doggett, 2020). This paradoxical coexistence allows him to reconcile the tangible and the surreal, presenting readers with a harmonious equilibrium that resonates with the diverse facets of the human experience (Cook, 2009). It is within this paradox that the therapeutic essence of his poetry unfolds, inviting readers to navigate the tumultuous waters of life through the prism of his verses.

Our journey through Stevens' poetic terrain encompasses an analysis of four of his distinguished poems—"Sunday Morning," "Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock," "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," and "The Snow Man." Each poem, a distinct brushstroke on the canvas of Stevens' oeuvre, contributes to the overarching theme of mental relief, offering readers unique vistas to contemplate and confront the challenges presented by the human condition. Stepping beyond the bounds of traditional literary movements, Stevens' poetic endeavours crystallize an aesthetic crisis that begets a novel theory and method within the realm of lyric poetry. This study reevaluates the conventional link between allegory and representation, challenging established perspectives and paving the way for a nuanced understanding of his creative evolution (Ford, 2012). The exploration of Stevens' work unveils a stylistic metamorphosis and a transformative reversal in his later compositions, marking the emergence of a radical immanent form of poetry. This transformation becomes the crucible through which readers experience not only mental relief but also intellectual enlightenment.

Stevens, with his adept fusion of cultural and natural imagery, beckons readers to embrace diverse perspectives when contemplating the external world. His poetry becomes a vehicle through which one can enhance problem-solving skills, deepen the understanding of reality,

and confront life's challenges with newfound resilience. In the contemporary landscape saturated with multifaceted problems and complexities, the cultivation of creativity and imagination becomes imperative. Stevens' approach to poetic expression provides a unique vantage point for individuals to harness these faculties, offering not just a reservoir of mental relief but also indispensable insights for navigating the challenges of modern existence.

Building upon Stevens' adept fusion of cultural and natural imagery, this study seeks to delve deeper into the transformative potential of his poetry. By exploring how Stevens' verses serve as a catalyst for enhancing problem-solving skills, deepening understanding of reality, and fostering resilience, we aim to highlight the enduring relevance of his work in navigating the complexities of contemporary life. In an era marked by multifaceted challenges, the cultivation of creativity and imagination emerges as indispensable tools for confronting adversity and embracing change. Stevens' poetic expression offers not only a source of mental relief but also invaluable insights for navigating the tumultuous terrain of modern existence. Through the analysis of four distinguished poems—"Sunday Morning," "Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock," "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," and "The Snow Man"—this study endeavors to illuminate the enduring significance of Stevens' poetry and its capacity to inspire readers to embrace diverse perspectives and confront life's challenges with renewed vigor and resilience. The rationale for this study stems from the need to address a significant gap in the literature surrounding the therapeutic dimensions of Wallace Stevens' poetry. While previous scholarship has acknowledged Stevens' literary prowess, there remains a dearth of comprehensive analyses that explore the transformative potential of his work in fostering mental relief and navigating life's complexities. By undertaking this critical exploration, the study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the intersection between poetry and mental well-being, shedding light on Stevens' enduring legacy as a source of inspiration and solace in the face of life's challenges.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Influence of Literature on Mental Well-being

The nexus between literature and mental well-being has emerged as a focal point in contemporary scholarly discourse, with diverse genres like poetry, essays, fiction, novels, and drama garnering attention for their potential therapeutic effects on individuals. Noteworthy investigations, such as the work conducted by Kidd and Castano (2013), illuminate the capacity of literary fiction to augment emotional intelligence by facilitating a nuanced understanding and interpretation of human emotions. Additionally, Oatley's research (2012) accentuates the therapeutic dimensions of novel reading, emphasizing its role in providing readers with a secure space for emotional exploration and a profound comprehension of intricate human experiences. The immersive quality inherent in literary narratives has been correlated with stress mitigation and an overall enhancement of well-being. Engaging with fictional realms, empathizing with characters, and navigating their tribulations offer readers a cognitive respite, temporarily alleviating the burdens of real-life stressors (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013). The impact of literature on mental health extends beyond the realm of fiction, with poetry and essays serving as succinct yet powerful mediums for emotional expression, enabling individuals to grapple with intense sentiments and discover solace in the eloquence of language (Freeman, 2018).

2.2 Wallace Stevens' Poetry: A Source of Mental Relief

This section explores Wallace Stevens' poetry as a source of mental relief, delving into its transformative power and profound impact on readers' psyches. The poetry of Wallace Stevens, a towering figure in American literature during the early twentieth century, serves as a profound testament to the transformative power of the human imagination, particularly in navigating life's intricate challenges (Middlebrook, 1968; Wilson, 2013). Stevens' poetic oeuvre, characterized by its intricate interweaving of cultural and natural imagery, has firmly established him as one of the preeminent voices of modernist literature (Doggett, 2020; Schulze, 2012). While he may have been perceived as more reserved in comparison to contemporaries such as T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, Stevens' poetry emanates a vibrancy that reflects the profound depths of his own existence (Ellmann, 2019). Central to this exploration is the recognition of Stevens' poetry not merely as a collection of literary works, but as a profound source of mental relief for both the poet himself and his readers. Throughout his verses, Stevens intricately explores themes of existential uncertainty, the human condition, and the intricate relationship between perception and reality. By immersing readers in rich tapestries of imagery and symbolism, he invites them to embark on a journey of introspection and contemplation, providing solace and fresh perspectives amidst life's tumultuous landscape. This literature review endeavors to delve deeply into the multifaceted nature of Stevens' poetry, illuminating its profound capacity to offer mental relief and foster resilience in the face of adversity.

2.3 The Genesis of Dualistic Worldview: Family and Upbringing

To comprehend the essence of Stevens' poetry and its capacity for providing solace and mental relief, it is imperative to delve into the facets of his upbringing and family background. Born into a family of high academic and societal standing, Stevens' formative years were steeped in intellectual vigour and cultural exposure (Phillips, 2008). His father, a prominent lawyer, and his mother, a cultivated woman with a love for literature, cultivated an environment that nurtured his intellectual growth (Eder, 1970; Wilson, 2013). This upbringing not only endowed him with a profound appreciation for literature and art but also left an indelible mark on his psyche. Yet, the proximity to intellectual and societal privilege also exposed Stevens to the complexities of life. He bore witness to the juxtaposition of affluence and social disparity, which left an enduring impact on his perception of the world. His poetry, often seen as a reflection of this dualistic worldview, attests to his acute awareness of life's inherent contradictions (Benamou, 2015). As a result, his verses offer readers a unique vantage point from which to engage with the complexities of existence. In this sense, Stevens' poetry becomes a source of mental relief by providing a means to grapple

with the enigmas of life and appreciate its multifaceted nature (Bates, 2011; Critchley, 2005).

2.4 *The Poetry of Poetic Diction*

Central to the enchantment of Wallace Stevens' poetry is his poetic diction, which gracefully interweaves the ordinary and the extraordinary, the quotidian and the transcendent (Filreis, 2014; Baird, 2020). His keen ability to infuse commonplace language with extraordinary profundity is nothing short of alchemy (Baird, 2020). Through this linguistic alchemy, Stevens elevates the mundane to the extraordinary, allowing readers to perceive the world anew (Filreis, 1989). It is in this transformation of language that we find a source of mental relief. Stevens' poems are more than words on a page; they are gateways to fresh perspectives and interpretations of reality (Holda, 2020). In his verses, the ordinary becomes imbued with the resonance of the profound, and the everyday experiences of life are elevated to the status of the extraordinary (Holander, 2008; Ziarek, 2020). This transmutation offers solace to readers, as it encourages them to explore the world from a different vantage point. When faced with the mundane or the challenging, Stevens' poetry invites readers to view these experiences as portals to deeper understanding and appreciation (Levi, 2021; Santilli, 2013). Thus, his poetry becomes a means of mental relief, enabling individuals to navigate the intricate terrain of life with renewed clarity and insight.

2.5 *New Criticism: A Transformative Lens*

To appreciate the full scope of how Wallace Stevens' poetry serves as a source of mental relief, one must consider the "New Criticism" approach as a lens through which to dissect and understand his work. The New Criticism movement, which gained prominence in the mid-twentieth century, is characterized by its rigorous scrutiny of the text itself, devoid of external influences (Moore, 2016; North, 2017; Kornstein, 1996). This analytical method illuminates the inherent complexities and nuances within Stevens' poetry. Through the lens of New Criticism, readers are empowered to engage with Stevens' poetry in a meticulous and introspective manner. Each word, phrase, and image are dissected, allowing for a profound exploration of the layers of meaning that lie beneath the surface. This analytical approach unveils the latent depths of his verses, unveiling new dimensions and interpretations that may offer mental relief to those grappling with the enigmas of existence (Fairbanks, 1997). By engaging with the text in this manner, readers can harness the intellectual and emotional solace embedded within Stevens' poetry (Buttel & Doggett, 2014; Holda, 2020).

The poetry of Wallace Stevens, with its unique blend of cultural and natural imagery, offers readers a profound source of mental relief (Gould & Tan, 2023). His dualistic worldview, influenced by his family and upbringing, invites readers to embrace life's complexities (Doggett, 2020). His poetic diction transforms the ordinary into the extraordinary, encouraging fresh perspectives on reality (Baird, 2020). The application of the New Criticism approach further reveals the intricate layers of his work, offering a transformative lens through which to understand and engage with his poetry (Han, 2019). In a world fraught with challenges, Stevens' poetry stands as a testament to the enduring power of the human imagination and its capacity to provide solace and mental relief.

2.6 *Previous Studies*

A substantial body of research has investigated the therapeutic potential of literature, particularly poetry, in promoting mental well-being. For instance, Carroll (2005) conducted a comprehensive study on the healing power of poetry, highlighting its capacity to facilitate emotional expression, foster resilience, and promote psychological healing among individuals facing various challenges that are echoed by the study of Heard (2009). Similarly, Akhan et al. (2022), Carvalho et al. (2021), Furman et al. (2002), and Peterkin and Grewal (2018) explored the efficacy of poetry therapy as an intervention for individuals with mental health disorders, demonstrating significant improvements in mood regulation, self-awareness, and overall psychological functioning. Building upon these findings, Chavis (2011) and Mcardle and Byrt (2001) focused on the role of nature imagery in poetry therapy, revealing its unique ability to enhance cognitive flexibility, emotional regulation, and connection with the natural world. Furthermore, studies by Bacon (2011) and Rosenfield (2007) emphasized the importance of cultural and societal factors in shaping individuals' responses to poetic stimuli, suggesting that cultural relevance and resonance play a crucial role in maximizing the therapeutic benefits of poetry. Collectively, these studies highlight the multifaceted ways in which poetry, enriched with cultural and natural imagery, serves as a powerful tool for promoting mental relief, emotional well-being, and holistic healing.

Despite the growing body of literature on the therapeutic potential of poetry, there remains a notable gap in understanding the specific mechanisms through which Wallace Stevens' poetry contributes to mental relief and well-being. While previous studies have explored the broader impacts of poetry therapy and the influence of cultural and natural imagery on emotional regulation, few have delved into the nuanced analysis of Stevens' poetic techniques and their direct effects on readers' psyches. This study aims to address this gap by conducting a comprehensive analysis of selected poems by Wallace Stevens, with a specific focus on their capacity to provide mental relief and foster resilience in the face of life's challenges. By elucidating the intricate interplay of cultural and natural imagery, symbolism, and language in Stevens' poetry, this research seeks to offer insights into the therapeutic dimensions of his work and contribute to a deeper understanding of the intersection between literature and mental well-being. Through a synthesis of findings, the study aims to provide valuable implications for poetry therapy practices and highlight the enduring relevance of Stevens' poetry as a source of inspiration and solace in contemporary society.

3. Methodology

This research employs a qualitative approach to comprehensively explore the therapeutic dimensions of Wallace Stevens' poetry. The study primarily centres on four of Stevens' poems: "Disillusionment of Ten O'clock," "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," "Sunday

Morning," and "The Snow Man." The chosen methodology integrates textual analysis, drawing insights from New Criticism, to unveil the intricate layers of Stevens' poetic language and its potential impact on readers. The analysis begins with a meticulous examination of each selected poem, focusing on distinct thematic elements. "Disillusionment of Ten O'clock" and "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" are scrutinized for their potential portrayal of mental relief and engagement with terrible situations, respectively. Simultaneously, "Sunday Morning" and "The Snow Man" are explored for their contributions to mental relief through alternative perspectives on spirituality and nature.

This study employs the New Criticism framework, a seminal approach in literary analysis that prioritizes a close examination of the text itself, divorcing interpretation from external context such as authorial intent or historical background (Stauffer, 1947). This method underscores the significance of the text's intrinsic qualities, encouraging a meticulous exploration of language, imagery, and symbolism (Wimsatt & Beardsley, 1946). By focusing solely on the literary work's internal dynamics, New Criticism offers scholars a robust analytical tool to uncover deeper layers of meaning and appreciate the text's artistic merit independent of outside influences (Stauffer, 1947). Its emphasis on textual analysis has shaped generations of literary scholarship, fostering a rigorous and disciplined approach to literary interpretation that continues to enrich our understanding of literature's complexities (Wimsatt & Beardsley, 1946). Utilizing this framework, the study adopts a critical lens that disregards extraneous contextual factors, honing in solely on the inherent qualities of the literary works. Through close reading, the analysis aims to identify patterns, paradoxes, and nuances within each poem, unravelling layers of meaning embedded in the text (Frye, 2020). A comparative analysis is then conducted, highlighting distinctive features within each poem and drawing connections between them (Stauffer, 1947). This approach allows for the synthesis of findings, offering a comprehensive understanding of how Stevens' diverse poetic techniques contribute to mental relief, the contemplation of reality, and the exploration of alternative perspectives (Wimsatt & Beardsley, 1946).

To enrich the discussion, additional poems by Wallace Stevens are integrated into the analysis, aligning with the overarching objective of exploring mental relief through poetry. This broader selection ensures a holistic evaluation of Stevens' contribution to the theme and the diversity of his poetic expressions. Furthermore, to fortify the interpretations, the study incorporates in-text citations from a range of scholarly articles, critiques, and analyses of Wallace Stevens' poetry. The comprehensive list of end references cites reputable sources that contribute to the scholarly discourse on the therapeutic dimensions of Stevens' poetry. Through the application of these methodologies, this research seeks to unravel the intricate layers of Wallace Stevens' poetry, shedding light on its potential as a source of mental relief and a means of engaging with the complexities of the human experience across a diverse range of thematic explorations.

4. Analysis

4.1 "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" - A Contemplation on Mental Perspective

Wallace Stevens' "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" unfolds as a multifaceted exploration of perception, identity, and the transformative potential of embracing diverse perspectives (Keast, 1954). The poem, composed of thirteen distinct sections, delves into the nature of reality and offers a nuanced perspective on how mental relief can be derived from the contemplation of the ordinary. Through its intricate structure and evocative language, Stevens invites readers to consider the myriad ways in which a single subject, the blackbird, can be perceived and understood (Lashari et al., 2017). Besides, the poem's structure, with its thirteen sections presenting different viewpoints, serves as a metaphor for the richness of human perception. Each section offers a unique lens through which the blackbird is observed, ranging from the stark realism of "Among twenty snowy mountains" to the metaphorical abstraction in "The blackbird whirled in the autumn winds" (Stevens, 1996). This variety of perspectives highlights the capacity of the human mind to find mental relief through the act of perception itself (Jim énez Muñoz, 2013).

The blackbird, as a recurring motif, takes on symbolic significance within the poem. It becomes a vehicle through which the reader can explore their own thoughts and emotions. In section VIII, "I know noble accents / And lucid, inescapable rhythms; / But I know, too, / That the blackbird is involved," Stevens introduces a sense of engagement with the blackbird. The symbolism suggests that finding meaning in simple, everyday occurrences, represented by the blackbird, can offer mental relief by fostering a connection with the world (Xuan, 2019). Stevens employs vivid imagery to capture moments of contemplation and mindfulness (Ziarek, 2020; Martz, 1958). In section VI, "Icicles filled the long window / With barbaric glass," the poet paints a scene that encourages readers to engage with the sensory aspects of the environment. This emphasis on sensory experience aligns with contemporary practices of mindfulness, where focusing on the present moment can alleviate mental stress and bring about a sense of relief (Keast, 1954).

The poem also delves into the concept of identity and self-perception. Section IV, "A man and a woman / Are one. / A man and a woman and a blackbird," suggests a merging of identities and the interconnectedness of all living things. This exploration of identity can be viewed as a source of mental relief by inviting readers to consider their place in the larger tapestry of existence (Henzler, 2018). Croom (2015) and Delamerced et al. (2021) explore the theme of perception and mental well-being in literature, emphasizing how works that challenge conventional perspectives can provide relief from cognitive rigidity. Studies show the therapeutic potential of mindfulness practices, linking the engagement with sensory details in poetry to mindfulness techniques that enhance mental resilience (Garland et al., 2015).

Overall, "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" stands as a poetic invitation to consider the intricate interplay of perception, symbolism, and mindfulness in the pursuit of mental relief. Stevens' exploration of the ordinary, when viewed through various lenses, underscores the transformative power of contemplation. By engaging with the poem's diverse perspectives, readers can find solace in the act of perception and, in turn, cultivate a deeper understanding of their own mental landscapes (Doodran & Zarrinjooee, 2013).

4.2 "Sunday Morning" - A Source of Mental Relief

Wallace Stevens' poem "Sunday Morning" provides a unique perspective on spirituality, nature, and mental relief, challenging traditional religious structures and inviting readers to contemplate alternative paths to solace and fulfilment. Through rich imagery and philosophical inquiries, the poem serves as a contemplative space for those seeking relief from the pressures of conventional religious practices (Feshbach, 1999). The poem initiates a departure from traditional religious rituals, suggesting that communion with nature can offer mental relief. The imagery of the "complacencies of the peignoir" and the "green freedom of a cockatoo" portrays a sense of leisure and tranquillity, contrasting with the rigidities of organized worship. This departure provides a mental escape and an opportunity for readers to find solace in the simplicity and beauty of the natural world (Feshbach, 1999).

"Sunday Morning" questions traditional religious conventions, proposing that true mental relief lies in individual contemplation and connection with the natural world. The lines "Is there no change of death in paradise? / Does ripe fruit never fall?" challenge the permanence of religious paradises and encourage readers to explore alternative perspectives (Angyal, 1979). This act of questioning becomes a liberating mental exercise, offering relief from unquestioned beliefs (Stevens, 1917). Moreover, the poem explores the idea that mental relief comes from freedom—freedom from religious dogma and the constraints of organized worship. Stevens contrasts the strictures of religious doctrine with the unbounded beauty of the natural world, suggesting that mental relief can be found in breaking away from doctrinal confines (Stevens & Jacobsen, 2004). This theme aligns with the idea that true spiritual fulfillment arises from personal exploration and a connection with the broader universe (Stevens, 1917).

Stevens proposes that artistic expression and imagination can serve as sources of mental relief. The woman in the poem contemplates art as an alternative path to spiritual fulfillment. Quoting the lines, such as "Casual flocks of pigeons make / Ambiguous undulations as they sink, / Downward to darkness, on extended wings," invites readers to immerse themselves in Stevens' vivid imagery (Angyal, 1979). This engagement with art provides a space for the imagination to flourish, offering a distinctive form of mental relief (Stevens, 1917). As found, Sia et al. (2020) and Vujcic et al. (2017) emphasize the psychological benefits of nature-based practices in promoting mental well-being. According to Williams, immersing oneself in natural environments can lead to reduced stress and increased feelings of tranquillity. Similarly, studies explore the link between creative expression and mental health, highlighting the therapeutic potential of engaging with art and imagination (Leckey, 2011). Overall, "Sunday Morning" serves as a source of mental relief by encouraging readers to reconsider their relationship with spirituality, nature, and art. The poem creates a contemplative space where individuals can find solace, question established norms, and explore alternative avenues for mental well-being (Feshbach, 1999).

4.3 "Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock" - A Reflection on Mental Relief

Wallace Stevens' poem "Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock" unfolds as a poignant exploration of societal conformity and the potential for mental relief through imaginative escape. In its verses, Stevens delves into the mundane nature of everyday life, contrasting the monotony of conventional existence with the liberating power of creative imagination (Baird, 2020). The poem, though seemingly bleak, offers a lens through which readers can contemplate the need for mental relief and the role of imagination in achieving it. The opening lines of the poem depict a scene where the inhabitants wear "white night-gowns," emphasizing the monotony and lack of variety in their lives. The repetitive and uninspiring nature of the nightgowns becomes a metaphor for the dull and predictable routines people adhere to, leading to a sense of disillusionment. Stevens captures this monotony through vivid descriptions, creating a stark contrast between the ordinary and the extraordinary (Stevens & Robaard, 1984).

While the poem portrays a society trapped in mundane routines, it also hints at the potential for mental relief through imagination. The speaker expresses dissatisfaction with the lack of variety in the residents' lives and yearns for the unconventional, as seen in the lines:

"None are green,

Or purple with green rings,

Or green with yellow rings,

Or yellow with blue rings" (Stevens, 1917).

The absence of vibrant colours in the nightgowns becomes a symbol of the inhabitants' failure to embrace imaginative and diverse experiences. Stevens suggests that mental relief can be found by breaking away from societal norms and allowing the imagination to flourish (Redding, 2020). The desire for "green," "purple," and "yellow" nightgowns reflects a longing for a more colorful and imaginative existence. The mention of an "old sailor" who "Catches tigers / In red weather" introduces an element of the unconventional within the poem. The sailor, in his unique and adventurous experiences, stands out from the ordinary residents. This figure becomes a symbol of the potential for individuality and creativity to bring about mental relief. By catching "tigers in red weather," the sailor engages in fantastical pursuits that deviate from the mundane, illustrating the transformative power of imagination (Lin, 2022).

Stevens suggests that leading an uninteresting life results in a lack of exciting dreams. The lines "People are not going / To dream of baboons and periwinkles" convey the speaker's disappointment with the unimaginative nature of the residents. Imagination, for Stevens, becomes a gateway to vibrant and fulfilling dreams. The use of unconventional and vivid imagery, such as "baboons and periwinkles," underscores the potential for mental relief through the richness of one's inner world (Özgür, 2022). As noted, Grinker (2021) argues that the suppression of imagination and conformity to societal norms contribute to mental distress. Besides, embracing creative thinking and unconventional ideas can offer a pathway to mental relief. Similarly, Jones (2020) explores the relationship between imagination and well-being, emphasizing the

therapeutic role of imaginative activities in alleviating stress and enhancing mental health (Rubinstein & Lahad, 2023). Thus, "Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock" presents a thought-provoking narrative on the search for mental relief in the face of societal monotony. Stevens' exploration of imagination as a source of relief aligns with contemporary perspectives on the importance of creative thinking for well-being. The poem encourages readers to reflect on their own lives, contemplate the role of imagination, and consider the potential for mental relief through embracing the unconventional (Lin, 2022).

4.4 "The Snow Man" - A Source of Mental Relief

Wallace Stevens' poem "The Snow Man" offers a distinctive perspective on mental relief through a contemplation of reality and the individual's perception of the world (Hoover, 2008). Despite its seemingly austere portrayal of winter, the poem provides a profound exploration of mental calmness and relief from the complexities of life. "The Snow Man" advocates for a mental state characterized by objectivity and detachment from subjective concerns. The speaker instructs the reader to "behold / Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is," emphasizing the importance of perceiving reality without the intrusion of personal biases (Reardon, 2022). This detachment from unnecessary mental burdens allows for a serene contemplation of the world, providing relief from the stresses associated with subjective interpretations.

The poem celebrates the tranquillity found in harmonizing with nature, particularly in the winter landscape. The snow-covered scene is described as a place where "the listener, who listens in the snow, / And, nothing himself, beholds / Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is" (Stevens, 1996). The act of being "nothing" in this context implies a merging with the natural surroundings, fostering a sense of unity and mental relief. The snow becomes a metaphor for the purity and clarity attained through a harmonious connection with the external world. Stevens suggests that mental relief comes from transcending the self-imposed crises and concerns that often dominate one's thoughts. The lines "For the listener, who listens in the snow, / And, nothing himself, beholds / Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is" invite readers to escape the self-centric perspective, finding peace in a state of attentive observation (Altieri, 2020). This redirection of focus from internal turmoil to external observation serves as a form of mental relief.

"The Snow Man" encourages a transformative shift in perception, advocating for a state of mind that appreciates the beauty inherent in simplicity and emptiness. The poem challenges readers to view the world without the burden of preconceived notions. Lines like "One must have a mind of winter / To regard the frost and the boughs / Of the pine-trees crusted with snow" underscore the necessity of cultivating a certain mental disposition—one that finds solace in the bare and unadorned aspects of existence (Tunncliffe, 2022). The poem addresses the transience of life and the inevitability of change. Rather than causing distress, this awareness of transience becomes a source of mental relief. The snow man, described as having "less to do with the play of the mind on its own idea and more to do with the mind's play on external existence," embodies a harmonious acceptance of life's fleeting nature (Gould & Tan, 2023). This acceptance contributes to mental calmness amid the tumultuous nature of existence.

As seen, Sia et al. (2020) and Vujcic et al. (2017) emphasize the therapeutic value of nature in promoting mental well-being. Accordingly, immersing oneself in natural environments, as depicted in "The Snow Man," has been linked to reduced stress and improved mental clarity. Similarly, Gould and Tan (2023) contend that the act of mindful observation, a key theme in Stevens' poem, is associated with decreased anxiety and increased emotional resilience. Overall, "The Snow Man" serves as a source of mental relief by advocating for detachment from subjective concerns, harmony with nature, and a transformative shift in perception (Reardon, 2022). Through its contemplation of the winter landscape, the poem offers a pathway to serenity and mental calmness, encouraging readers to find solace in the simplicity and beauty of the world.

5. Comparative Analysis of Wallace Stevens' Selected Poems

Wallace Stevens, a towering figure in twentieth-century American poetry, employs diverse techniques across his works to provide readers with avenues for mental relief and contemplation of reality. This comparative analysis delves into four of his poems — "Disillusionment of Ten O'clock," "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," "Sunday Morning," and "The Snow Man" — to elucidate their unique contributions and highlight common themes that resonate throughout Stevens' poetic oeuvre. Stevens' thematic exploration often revolves around the dichotomy between mundane reality and the potential for mental escape. In "Disillusionment of Ten O'clock," the contrast between the dull reality of "colourless, thin" houses and the vibrant dreamscape exemplifies this theme (Binamou, 2015). This resonates across the poems, where the pursuit of mental relief is intricately tied to the imagination and the ability to transcend the commonplace.

A recurrent motif in Stevens' poetry is the contemplation of alternative perspectives. "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" epitomizes this theme, offering a multitude of viewpoints on the blackbird, suggesting that mental relief can be found in the diversity of perspectives (Henzler, 2018; Keast, 1954). This notion echoes in other poems, where Stevens encourages readers to adopt varied viewpoints, fostering a broader understanding of reality as a source of solace. Nature serves as a consistent source of mental relief across these poems. In "Sunday Morning," the speaker forgoes traditional religious structures for communion with nature. Similar sentiments are echoed in "The Snow Man," where embracing the tranquillity of a "mind of winter" is posited as a pathway to mental relief (Gould & Tan, 2023). The natural world, with its vivid imagery and timeless beauty, emerges as a therapeutic space for readers to find solace.

The theme of detachment and objectivity as a means of achieving mental relief is prevalent in "The Snow Man." By becoming a detached observer, one attains a serene state, free from the burden of projecting human emotions onto the world (Gould & Tan, 2023). This theme of detachment, albeit in different forms, resonates in other poems, highlighting Stevens' fascination with the idea of transcending subjectivity for a clearer understanding of existence. A synthesis of these findings reveals Stevens' adeptness at employing diverse techniques to evoke mental relief (Gerber, 2021). The thematic multiplicity, vivid imagery, and philosophical inquiry present across the

poems collectively contribute to the therapeutic nature of his poetry. Whether through imaginative escapades, contemplation of alternative perspectives, communion with nature, or detachment from subjective emotions, Stevens invites readers to engage with his work for multifaceted mental relief and contemplation of reality.

6. Conclusion

Wallace Stevens, an eminent figure in twentieth-century American poetry, weaves a rich tapestry of thought-provoking verse that serves as a contemplative haven for readers grappling with life's challenges. This article has delved into four of Stevens' poems, each offering a unique lens through which individuals can find mental relief and contemplative solace. "Sunday Morning" beckons readers to reconsider traditional religious structures and find mental relief in the communion with nature. By questioning religious conventions and embracing freedom from dogma, Stevens invites individuals to explore personal spirituality. The poem emphasizes the therapeutic potential of artistic expression and imagination, offering an alternative path to spiritual fulfilment.

In "Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock," Stevens laments the dull and monotonous lives of individuals, emphasizing the importance of breaking away from societal norms. The poem suggests that mental relief can be found by infusing imagination into everyday life, challenging the constraints of routine. The vivid imagery of "white night-gowns" haunted by the desire for uniqueness serves as a metaphor for the need to escape the mundane (Stevens, 1919). "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" unfolds as a contemplation on perception, identity, and the transformative potential of diverse perspectives. Through its intricate structure and vivid imagery, the poem invites readers to engage in mindfulness, finding mental relief by exploring the ordinary through various lenses. The blackbird becomes a symbolic vehicle for contemplating one's thoughts and emotions.

"The Snow Man" offers a perspective on mental relief through embracing objectivity. By dissociating from personal emotions and adopting the detached gaze of the snow man, individuals can find relief from the tumult of subjective experience. The poem suggests that a clear, unclouded mind, akin to the snow man's, can offer solace in the face of life's challenges. Collectively, these poems provide a therapeutic exploration of diverse themes. Stevens' poetry encourages readers to reconsider spirituality, embrace imagination, challenge societal norms, and adopt mindfulness. The interplay of these elements contributes to a holistic approach to mental well-being, offering relief from the pressures of daily life. By contemplating the ordinary, engaging with nature, and questioning established norms, individuals can navigate the complexities of existence.

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