



ANECDOTE OF THE JAR

BY WALLACE STEVENS

WALLACE STEVENS (1879-1955)


- ▶ American poet who explores reality.
- ▶ Worked briefly for the New York Herald Tribune
- ▶ Won a degree(1904) at the New York Law School and practiced law in the city.
- ▶ His first poem appeared in 1914
- ▶ “Harmonium”(1923), his first book, received some favorable critical notices. In it, he introduced the **imagination-reality** theme.
- ▶ Important *works*: “The Comedian as the letter C”, “*Transport to Summer*”, “*Sea Surface Full of Clouds*”, “*The Auroras of Autumn*” was followed by his “*Collected Poems(1954)*, which earned him the Pulitzer Prize for poetry.

POEM OVERVIEW

- ▶ An imagist poem in which Wallace Stevens explores superiority between art and nature.
- ▶ It answers the question, Is nature superior to human creations? Does human creativity surpass nature in some way?
- ▶ This poem solves the riddle by recognizing the unique difference between art and nature
- ▶ Art may sometimes be more beautiful than nature but it cannot be as creative as nature.


SUMMARY

- ▶ Once the poet kept a big and beautiful jar upon an untidy hill in Tennessee.
- ▶ It was a beautiful round jar, reminding one of the Grecian urns of Keats.
- ▶ The jar is an art object made by a human being (man made), whereas the hill on which it is placed is natural.
- ▶ The wilderness of the hill is more untidy now.
- ▶ The wilderness of the surrounding land seemed to row up around the jar
- ▶ i.e. the jar is affecting the world around it. Apparently, there is a lot of wilderness around the place
- ▶ In the second quatrain, the “slovenly” and wild nature rises up to the artistic jar. The jar or imagination tames or controls the wilderness.

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- ▶ The jar domineers “everywhere”. This is a striking expression of the power of the imagination over reality.
 - ▶ In the third stanza, the poem takes a turn, persona shifts from the lofty images, described the majestic jar like “gray” and “bare object”, which cannot give birth and recreate.
 - ▶ The poet accepts the limits of imaginations.
 - ▶ Steven’s central concern in his poetry is reality v/s imagination, man made v/s natural.
 - ▶ The jar/imagination is richer than nature but not productive
 - ▶ Both have their uniqueness but its true that nature is diverse , creative an limitless, ‘art is not capable of what nature is’.

PUZZLE RESOLVED

- ▶ Anecdote has been a puzzle for readers
- ▶ It's a short lyrical imagist poem.(Imagism is a type of poetry that describes images with simple language and great focus)
- ▶ Consisting of three, 4-line stanzas(quatrains)
- ▶ The word 'anecdote' suggests that it is an incidental report of a minor event.
- ▶ The speaker is presumably the author, appears only in the first line as "I", he detaches himself as merely an observer.
- ▶ Familiarity, simplicity and detachment serve energy on contemplating the deeper meaning, or content of the poem.

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- ▶ The poem throughout speaks about the story of a “jar” and a “hill”; expresses the progressive overtaking of the industry over nature. In the final stanza, that overtaking is revealed to be a sad and absurd prospect.
 - ▶ The poet through comparisons makes it clear that nature is far more remarkable than the industry.
 - ▶ The 3 stanzas combined can be read as a lament for the forsaking of nature for technical and technological betterment.