

# Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird

By Wallace Stevens

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Eye

Whirled

Autumn Winds

Pantomime ----- The telling of a story without words, by means of bodily movements, gestures, and facial expressions

Inflections ----- **a.** Linguistics / Grammar (*Grammar*) a change in the form of a word, usually modification or affixation, signaling change in such grammatical functions as tense, voice, mood, person, gender, number, or case

**b.** An angle or bend

Innuendoes ----- An indirect or subtle, usually derogatory implication in expression; an insinuation

Mood

Indecipherable ----- Impossible to determine the meaning of

Haddam ----- An Arabic name

Golden Birds

Lucid ----- **a.** Easily understood; intelligible

**b.** Mentally sound; sane or rational

**c.** Translucent or transparent

Inescapable rhythms

Bawds ----- **a.** A woman who keeps a brothel; a madam

**b.** A woman prostitute

Euphony ----- agreeableness in sounds; a pleasantness to the ear; harmoniousness

Glass Coach

Fear ----- a feeling of distress, apprehension, or alarm caused by impending danger, pain, etc.

Equipage ----- a horse-drawn carriage, especially one elegantly equipped and attended by liveried footmen

Due to the intertwining of thoughts, it was difficult to break this poem down line by line or even stanza by stanza. The author goes back and forth between expressing the thoughts and feelings of the man, (the poet) and those of the blackbird. At times the author sees himself as one with the blackbird.

I

Among twenty snowy mountains,  
The only moving thing  
Was the eye of the blackbird.

II

I was of three minds,  
Like a tree  
In which there are three blackbirds.

III

The blackbird whirled in the autumn winds.  
It was a small part of the pantomime.

IV

A man and a woman  
Are one.  
A man and a woman and a blackbird  
Are one.

V

I do not know which to prefer,  
The beauty of inflections  
Or the beauty of innuendoes,  
The blackbird whistling  
Or just after.

VI

Icicles filled the long window  
With barbaric glass.  
The shadow of the blackbird  
Crossed it, to and fro.  
The mood  
Traced in the shadow  
An indecipherable cause.

VII

O thin men of Haddam,  
Why do you imagine golden birds?  
Do you not see how the blackbird  
Walks around the feet  
Of the women about you?

### **Stanza I, II, III, XII and XIII**

The Blackbird is surrounded by the vastness of 20 mountains, the autumn winds and the snow. He is but a small part, a part of the story of the universe.

#### **Stanza I**

The eye of the blackbird is like and the opening, the eye of a needle, opening into the mind of the blackbird.

#### **Stanza II and IV**

The poet is one with the blackbird.

#### **Stanza II**

The poet is one of the three blackbirds in the tree.

#### **Stanza IV**

A man and a woman are one and since the man and the blackbird are one in the same, the three become one.

#### **Stanza V**

The poet is in conflict; he is not sure which he prefers the beauty of listening to the blackbird sing and how his music can change the mood or the subtle implications of what the silence means after the blackbird has sung his mating call.

#### **Stanza VI**

For the poet watching the blackbird through a window, it is impossible for him to understand the blackbird and to determine the usefulness or purpose of his actions.

#### **Stanza VII**

The blackbird does not understand man or why man looks for the "golden bird," a bird that does not exist. Can man not see the beauty of the blackbird, a real bird that walks and lives among them?

VIII

I know noble accents  
And lucid, inescapable rhythms;  
But I know, too,  
That the blackbird is involved  
In what I know.

IX

When the blackbird flew out of sight,  
It marked the edge  
Of one of many circles.

X

At the sight of blackbirds  
Flying in a green light,  
Even the bawds of euphony  
Would cry out sharply.

XI

He rode over Connecticut  
In a glass coach.  
Once, a fear pierced him,  
In that he mistook  
The shadow of his equipage  
For blackbirds.

XII

The river is moving.  
The blackbird must be flying.

XIII

It was evening all afternoon.  
It was snowing  
And it was going to snow.  
The blackbird sat  
In the cedar-limbs.

### **Stanza VIII**

The poet knows how the nobles and royals use the sounds of rhythms and accents to capture their audience and it is impossible to escape why the blackbird also uses its rhythms sounds and music.

### **Stanza IX and X**

Although the blackbird is no longer in view of the poet it is view of someone else and at the sight of the blackbird even those who enjoy cheap pleasures such as those of a prostitute, can see the beauty of the blackbird and cry with great joy.

### **Stanza XI**

An unknown person in a glass coach is pierced by an unknown danger when he mistakenly assumes the shadow of a blackbird to be that of footman.

### **Stanza XII**

The river is moving, maybe the snow is melting and the birds are flying. Sounds like springtime.

### **Stanza XIII**

The snow is falling again and will continue to snow and the blackbird is once again shown as a small part of a vast universe.

The poem jumps around: from the countryside to the city and back to the country, from the cold of winter, to springtime and back to winter etc. The poem goes back and forth from being seen through the eyes of man and those of the blackbird. The poem had an eclectic feel to it with no rhyme or reason until the reader tears it apart.

"Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" is a poem from Wallace Stevens's first book of poetry, *Harmonium*. The poem consists of thirteen short, separate sections, each of which mentions blackbirds in some way. Although inspired by haiku, none of the sections meets the traditional definition of haiku. It was first published in October 1917 by Alfred Kreyborg in *Others: An Anthology of the New Verse* and two months later in the December issue of *Others: A Magazine of the New Verse*. Among twenty snowy mountains, The only moving thing Was the eye of the black bird. II. I was of three minds, Like a tree. In which there are three blackbirds. III. The blackbird whirled in the autumn winds. It was a small part of the pantomime. IV. A man and a woman. A few thoughts after reading *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird* by Wallace Stevens (1879~1955) by Sang-dae Suh on Thursday, June 16, 2011 at 4: 20am As it is suggested in the title of the poem, Stevens depicts thirteen different images of a blackbird in thirteen stanzas. I can visualize thirteen unique pictures of the bird in each and every stanza of the poem. ' Why does the poet come up with so many differing delineations of the same creature? ' I wondered. *Harmonium*. View [Tracklist](#). *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird*. Wallace Stevens. In thirteen stanzas "inspired by haiku, although not strictly haiku" Stevens presents

| [Read More](#). View [All Credits](#). In thirteen stanzas "inspired by haiku, although not strictly haiku" Stevens presents thirteen seemingly unrelated vignettes involving a blackbird. Expand

âŽ. *Harmonium*. Wallace Stevens. *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird*. *Cy Est Pourtraicte, Madame Ste Ursule, et Les Unze Mille Vierges*. *Invective Against Swans*. *Of the Surface of Things*. *The Worms at Heaven's Gate*. *The Death of a Soldier*. *The Snow Man*.