

WHY DID WALLACE STEVENS WRITE ANECDOTE OF THE JAR

QUESTIONS

It was written in and published in Harmonium, the first book from Wallace Incidentally, Wallace Stevens made a tour of Tennessee in and Anecdote of the Jar is a poem that poses more questions than answers.

It made the slovenly wilderness Surround that hill. Finally, the jar takes over. As the poem progresses there is a definite shift in the influence of the jar. Pretty straightforward, eh? It also becomes the prime mover in the psychological landscape. More than that, the poem is pointing the reader in the direction of philosophical contemplation. It's never too late, it seems, to turn your life over the power of the imagination. Which holds more sway over you: the static, empty jar, or the unruly, creative wilderness? Written in iambic tetrameter - eight syllables on average per line, with one or two exceptions - it is a tightly knit creation of three stanzas, each a quatrain. The quantum leap comes in line three as the reader is informed of the power of that same jar. We're like so many ordinary jars, just tumbling off a conveyer belt and being packaged into a cardboard existence. When you think about it, the very fact that a jar is so commonplace means it could characterize everyday life for us humans. Any lover of wilderness, and any lover of domestic comfort, really, can find something to think about in this poem, just as anyone who uses jars, or spoons, or even a toothbrush can. Should we not take this bizarre poem too seriously? One reason for that might have been how relatively late in life Stevens began to publish. It has a slightly surreal, almost playful feel which is so typical of Wallace Stevens, who liked nothing better than to have his poetry resist the intelligence. It made the slovenly wilderness Surround that hill. Some immediately noted its modernist tone and critics likened the subject matter to the ready-made objects of artist and pioneer Marcel Duchamps, infamous for introducing a urinal into an art exhibition in New York in 1917. The jar seems to be a port, an opening that allows the chaos of the wilderness to become the order of the mind, and the chaos of the mind to become the order of the wilderness. It certainly seems to change from stanza to stanza - first it is round, then still round and tall and of a port, and in the end it's sort of nondescript. Share this: The jar is an everyday object, a mass produced storage container made of glass which is, strangely, placed on top of a hill by the speaker. Just why the jar should affect the hillside and the wilderness surrounding is best answered by the poem itself. This is a striking expression of the power of the imagination over reality. The wilderness rose up to it, And sprawled around, no longer wild.