

Snow



SUMMARY

The speaker is in a room that's suddenly filled with vibrance as snow falls outside a large bay window, against which also lean some pink roses. These two things were quietly part of the same world, yet they totally clashed. The world sneaks up on us sooner than people would like.

The world is bigger and more bizarre than people think, the speaker says, and people fail to realize how stubbornly diverse it is. The speaker peels a tangerine and splits it into different segments, then spits out the seeds while eating it and feels giddy from the knowledge that one thing can be all many things at once (or that many different things can exist at the same time).

The fire blazes and bubbles. The world is both meaner and happier than people imagine, and people take it in through their senses of taste, sight, hearing, and touch. The glass of the window isn't the only thing standing between the snow and the massive roses.

"incurably plural"—inevitably filled with diversity and variety that exists in the same space.

The poem also implies that people don't tend to notice or appreciate how bizarre and "various" the world truly is. The speaker talks about eating a tangerine, for example, before noting that even this specific fruit isn't actually a single, unified object; it's filled with individual "pips," or seeds, that the speaker must "spit" out. The tangerine is both whole and made up of fragmented parts, both edible and inedible. And, to the speaker, there's something both giddy and dizzying about that sense of plurality—a feeling the speaker calls "The drunkenness of things being various."

Similarly, the speaker says that the world is "more spiteful and gay than one supposes"—meaning the world is both crueler *and* more joyful than people tend to think. This might seem impossible—how can the world be both meaner and nicer at the same time? But maybe that's the speaker's point: though the speaker refers to "World" as if it were a single, complete thing, the poem is perhaps *really* about how that way of seeing reality is subjective and incomplete, because the world is in fact filled with opposing entities that seem to impossibly, yet inevitably, co-exist.

The speaker seems to reference this mysterious truth about reality when declaring that there is "more than glass" between themselves and the sight of the snow/roses. The speaker might also be talking about the limits of human perception here, suggesting that there's more to the world, more dividing lines between individual entities, than people can perceive. Or, maybe, the speaker is saying essentially the opposite: that there's more *connecting* these individual entities than people ever realize.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-12



THEMES



THE DIVERSITY AND VARIETY OF THE WORLD

Louis MacNeice has [said](#) that the mysterious "Snow" is about "the realization of a very obvious fact, that one thing is different from another." Indeed, seeing white snow pile up outside a window alongside "pink roses" makes the poem's speaker think about how surprising, diverse, and contradictory the world can be. Put simply, the poem seems to comment on the strangeness and excitement of living in a reality that's "suddener," "crazier," and more "various" than people tend to acknowledge.

The poem opens with the speaker being struck by a "suddenly rich" image: accumulating "snow" on one side of a "great bay-window" alongside "pink roses." These two opposing objects—the white, wintry snow and the colorful, summery roses—seem "incompatible," suggesting to the speaker that the world is composed of individual elements that stubbornly refuse to reconcile themselves into a neat whole.

And yet, these objects are also "collateral," a word that can refer to things existing side-by-side or to things that share an ancestor via different lines. And roses and snow do, in a sense, come from the same place: both are tied to the seasonal changes caused by the rotation of the earth. At the heart of the poem, then, seems to be an epiphany that the world is



LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-2

*The room was ...
... roses against it*

When the poem begins, readers can picture the speaker in a room watching as snow falls outside a bay window (which is just the same for a certain kind of window that projects outward from a wall in an arc). There are some "pink roses" against the window too, presumably inside the speaker's room. (Or, perhaps, this is a freak spring snowstorm, and both snow and

roses are outside and separated from the speaker by this window—the poem's language is ambiguous!)

The speaker, it seems, was already in this room before the poem began, but "suddenly" sees it all with fresh eyes. It's unclear if the falling snow itself is what prompts this sudden shift in perspective or if it comes out of nowhere.

Either way, it's like the world announces itself anew at this moment, causing the speaker to marvel at its "variousness," expressed through the [juxtaposition](#) of the snow and roses. There's something about the contrasts within this image—the chilly whiteness of the snow and the fresh vibrancy of the "pink roses"—that makes the room feel more vibrant and interesting.

Note how the sounds of the poem emphasize the speaker's sudden wonder:

- For example, listen to the [alliteration](#) between "room" and "rich" and the [assonance](#) of "great bay-window." Such devices elevate the speaker's language and hint to the reader that something major is happening.
- The soft [sibilance](#) of "Spawning snow" then evokes the gentle, whispery whoosh of now coming down.
- The [enjambment](#) between lines 1 and 2, meanwhile, suggests the suddenness of the speaker's revelation. There's no pause between "was" and "Spawning," a choice that makes the poem's opening seem breathless and exciting.

"Spawning" is also an intriguing word choice. It perhaps suggests a visual similarity between the snow's patterns against the window and the appearance of eggs laid by frogs, fish, and so on. It's a weird word—which is kind of the poem's point: the world is a strange place! The word also subtly connects the inanimate snow to the living roses, perhaps reminding readers that, however different these items seem, they're both children of (spawned by!) the natural world.

LINES 3-4

*Soundlessly collateral and ...
... we fancy it.*

The speaker expands on the striking visual [juxtaposition](#) between the pink roses inside and the white snow outside, now saying that these objects are "soundlessly collateral." In other words, they're silently side by side. The word "collateral" can also refer to descendants from different family lines.

The snow and roses are *literally* side by side at this moment—the snow on one side of the window and the roses on the other. They're also side by side in the sense that spring can be happening in one hemisphere and winter in the other. And they're both a part of—perhaps "descended from"—the earth, the product of natural cycles of seasonal change.

And yet, the speaker also says that the snow and roses are

"incompatible," a word that means they don't fit or go together:

- Snow is cold, colorless, and associated with winter—a season linked with death and dormancy.
- The roses, meanwhile, connote romance and are a colorful sign of spring—a season linked with growth and new life.

All in all, then, the speaker seems to be commenting on how strange and confusing it is that two things that are so distinct can also be so intimately connected.

Notice the thick [consonance](#) of this line:

Soundlessly collateral and incompatible:

The line itself is a mouthful to say aloud, evoking the "rich" yet confounding diversity being described.

The colon after "incompatible" then indicates that the next line is the speaker's conclusion based on lines 1-3. Having noticed the *distinctness* of the snow and the roses, the speaker states that:

World is suddener than we fancy it.

In other words, most people most of the time don't notice the variety, diversity, and downright strangeness of the world they occupy. But occasionally, the world reveals these qualities to those attentive enough to see them.

There is no definite article ("the"), making "World" itself almost like a character with a personal name (the poem goes on to fully [personify](#) the world later). The speaker seems enthralled by the tension between the idea of the "World" as one singular entity *and* the fact it contains a seemingly limitless variety of *separate* objects. (It's also entirely possible to read this all as a broader [metaphor](#) for humanity itself, made up of billions of utterly unique yet deeply linked individuals living side by side.)

LINES 5-8

*World is crazier ...
... things being various.*

Line 5 uses [anaphora](#), picking up the construction of line 4 and starting again with the word "World." This is the other part of the speaker's epiphany: the world isn't just *suddenly there* in all its full sensory glory, but it's also a more *senseless* or seemingly illogical place than people tend to think it is.

It's also "Incorrigibly plural," an interesting phrase that [personifies](#) the world as stubbornly refusing to be one simple, unified entity. Instead, it's "plural," made up of a rich and seemingly limitless variety of *things*. There's "more" world than people imagine.

The speaker follows this phrase up with a full stop [caesura](#),

bringing the line to a complete pause before diving into what seems to be a concrete example of this incorrigible plurality: the speaker eats a tangerine, which readers might take as representing the world itself and the way in which the world divides into smaller, distinct entities.

Think about how even just a humble tangerine is not just *one* thing, but many. A tangerine has its peel, its different segments, each individual seed, and so on. Each of these distinct things, while being part of the tangerine, also has its own name and presence. The world, this tangerine digression implies, is similarly divisible, which is what makes the speaker feel giddy—drunk on the knowledge that there is so much "more" world "than we think."

Once again, the poem's sounds bring its ideas to life. Take all the plosive /p/ and biting /t/ [alliteration](#) and [consonance](#) in lines 6-7:

Incorrigibly plural. I peel and portion
A tangerine and spit the pips and feel

These sounds have a spitting quality that fits with the image being described. The [assonance](#) of "spit" and "pips" adds to the lines' rhythm and momentum as well. Also note the [polysyndeton](#) here, with all those "ands" suggesting a piling up of actions.

The poem sums this all up with one of Macneice's most oft-quoted lines, the speaker feeling "The drunkenness of things being various." It's a kind of vertigo-like feeling that stems from the sheer unending display of variety that humans call the world.

LINES 9-10

*And the fire ...
... than one supposes—*

At the start of the next stanza, the speaker's focus shifts to a fire that's apparently in the room (presumably in a fireplace!). This fire, the poem implies, is another thing that speaks to the "various[ness]" of the world.

Note the [alliteration](#) of "fire flames," which adds music and intensity to the speaker's language. This fire makes a "bubbling" sound, the speaker continues, using an [onomatopoeic](#) word that's a more surprising description than, say, "crackling" or "spitting." But surprise is the name of the game here; the speaker is still seeing and experiencing the environment in a new and disorienting way. The fire also further [juxtaposes](#) this room from the outside world (just as the roses and the snow did earlier): it's cold and snowy outside, but inside a fire is "bubbling."

The speaker picks up on this sense of duality by claiming that the world, [paradoxically](#), is both "more spiteful" (meaner or crueler) and more "gay" (happier, more joyful) than people

realize. The world, to this speaker, is at once worse *and* better than "one supposes"!

LINES 11-12

*On the tongue ...
... the huge roses.*

In the poem's concluding lines, the speaker boldly states that there is "more" going on with reality than meets the eye. The speaker then refers to four senses (taste, sight, hearing, and touch), suggesting that it is through these senses that people experience the cruelty and joy mentioned in the previous line. In other words, people's experience of the world is filtered through their individual perceptions.

Note the [asyndeton](#) and [repetition](#) in this list:

On the tongue on the eyes on the ears in the palms of
one's hands—

There isn't a comma in sight here, let alone an "and"! The asyndeton makes all these senses feel interconnected, but it also creates a feeling of being overwhelmed. The tongue, the eyes, the ears, the hands—these are all taking in information about the world all of the time. It's a wonder people can make it through the day with all this going on! The repetitive [parallelism](#) has the effect of bombarding the reader, just as one's senses are bombarded by daily reality.

The speaker then says that there's "more than glass between the snow and the huge roses," a line that, fitting for a poem about plurality, seems to mean two things at once:

- There are more *barriers dividing* the speaker and roses from the snow;
- There are more *bridges connecting* the speaker and roses with the snow.

The poem thus ends on a mysterious, ambiguous note, one that implies that all these disparate parts of the world are at once more and less connected than people think.



SYMBOLS



THE WINDOW

The "great bay-window" [symbolizes](#) both the connection and the division between all the "various" "things" that make up the world.

The window, of course, quite literally stands between the speaker and the world outside the speaker's room. It's not entirely clear whether the roses that lean against the window are also inside with the speaker, or if in the strange world of this poem it's somehow snowing while roses are still in bloom

outside. In any case, the window is a physical barrier that the speaker can't cross.

In this way, it seems to represent the barriers that divide various elements of the world (perhaps including those barriers that keep various groups of people apart).

At the same time, the speaker *can* see *through* the window. In fact, it's through this window that the speaker sees the scene that sets the poem in motion. In this way, the window *connects* the speaker with the snow and roses, presenting these two "collateral and incompatible" things at the same time. Were the window not there, the speaker wouldn't be able to see the snow falling at all!

The window thus isn't just standing "between" the snow and roses in the sense of physically *dividing* them, but it's also *connecting* them—allowing the speaker to see the world's "various[ness]."

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-2:** "the great bay-window was / Spawning snow and pink roses against it"
- **Line 12:** "There is more than glass between the snow and the huge roses."



THE TANGERINE

The tangerine that the speaker decides to "peel and portion" partway through the poem represents the plurality of the world: the way that it can be both whole *and* made up of disparate parts at the same time.

The tangerine is a literal, physical fruit. But it also consists of various different elements: skin, pips, flesh, juice, and so on. Thus despite being one unified thing—a specific kind of fruit—it's also not one unified thing at all!

The tangerine thus reflects the complexity of the world, which, the poem says, is "[i]ncorrigibly plural": stubbornly many things all at once.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 6-7:** "I peel and portion / A tangerine and spit the pips"



POETIC DEVICES

ALLITERATION

Devices like [alliteration](#), [consonance](#), and [assonance](#) draw attention to the richness and variety world by filling the poem with rich, varied language.

This all begins with "room" and "rich" in line 1. These two /r/

sounds elevate the speaker's language, making it sound more intense just as the room suddenly glows with the strangeness of existence. The next line has alliteration too: the gentle [sibilance](#) of "Spawning snow" evokes that gentle, hushed snowfall.

In the following stanza, the speaker finds an object that seems to express the "drunkenness of things being various"—that is, the fact that the world is filled with endless variety and diversity. Here, plosive /p/ sounds bring the language to life, and might even make readers hear the tangerine's pips being spat out of the speaker's mouth:

[...] Incorrigibly plural. I peel and portion
A tangerine and spit the pips and feel

The consonance and assonance of /p/ in "spit the pips" adds to the effect, the phrase itself sounds a lot like the action being described.

And in the final stanza, the fricative /f/ sounds of "fire flames" draw readers' attention to yet another thing that stands in stark contrast with the snow outside. They also provide a little hiss of air that might suggest a fire catching in the hearth.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "room," "rich"
- **Line 2:** "Spawning snow"
- **Line 6:** "plural," "peel," "portion"
- **Line 7:** "pips"
- **Line 9:** "fire flames," "sound"
- **Line 10:** "spiteful," "supposes"

ASSONANCE

[Assonance](#) works with [alliteration](#) and [consonance](#) to make the poem's language vibrant and vivid. The speaker feels amazed at the world's mindboggling variety, which is reflected in the richness of the poem's sounds.

Notice, for example, how assonance brings the [imagery](#) in lines 1 and 2 to life:

The room was suddenly rich and the great bay-
window was
Spawning snow and pink roses against it

The long, wide vowel sounds in "great bay-window" seem to evoke the size of that big window and make it seem all the more significant. The two round /o/ sounds in "snow" and "roses," meanwhile, links these two very different pieces of the natural world together. And that's kind of the speaker's point: that everything is both connected *and* utterly separate.

Line 7 also uses assonance in an interesting way. The clipped /ih/ sounds, popping /p/ sounds, and hissing /s/ sounds of "spit

the pips" make this phrase sound like it's being spat out of the speaker's mouth.

Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "great bay-window"
- **Line 2:** "snow," "roses"
- **Line 3:** "Soundlessly collateral," "incompatible"
- **Line 7:** "spit," "pips"
- **Line 8:** "drunkenness," "various"
- **Line 12:** "snow," "roses"

ASYNDETON

The poem uses [asyndeton](#) in line 11, where the speaker alludes to the human senses (minus smell, that is):

On the tongue on the eyes on the ears in the palms of
one's hands—

Elsewhere, the poem has been pretty conventional in terms of its use of grammar and punctuation. Here, though, that goes out of the window! The speaker seems to be marvelling out at how people can perceive the world in so many different ways—through sight, sound, touch, and so forth. And the asyndeton and [parallelism](#) (the repetition of the same grammatical structure) of this line make the list feel speedy and maybe even overwhelming and breathless. The poem builds up its intensity at this moment, the language evoking the speaker's awe.

Where Asyndeton appears in the poem:

- **Line 11:** "On the tongue on the eyes on the ears in the palms of one's hands—"

CONSONANCE

[Consonance](#) works just like [alliteration](#) and [assonance](#) in the poem, elevating the speaker's language, intensifying the poem's [imagery](#), and suggesting the richness of the world itself.

Note, for example, the rush of /s/ and /k/ sounds in the first stanza:

Spawning snow and pink roses against it
Soundlessly collateral and incompatible:
World is suddener than we fancy it.

The sounds here are striking for their contrast: [sibilance](#) is hushed and quiet, whereas the /k/ sounds are loud, sharp, and bold. The sounds of the lines themselves, then, subtly mimic the variety of the world being described—a place where "incompatible" things can exist side by side.

Also note how line 3 in particular is a real mouthful, with its

mixture of sounds made right behind one's teeth and all the way at the back of the throat: "Soundlessly collateral and incompatible." The line seems to reflect the speaker's view of the world as stubbornly complicated and various.

Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "room," "rich"
- **Line 2:** "Spawning snow," "pink," "against"
- **Lines 3-3:** "S / oundlessly collatera / l"
- **Line 3:** "incompatible"
- **Line 4:** "suddener," "fancy"
- **Line 6:** "Incorrigibly plural," "peel," "portion"
- **Line 7:** "spit," "pips"
- **Line 8:** "drunkenness," "things being various"
- **Line 9:** "fire flames," "bubbling," "sound," "world"
- **Line 10:** "spiteful," "supposes"
- **Line 12:** "glass," "snow"

ENJAMBMENT

[Enjambment](#) creates a sense of breathlessness and surprise in the poem. The poem is like an epiphany, and it's no coincidence that the speaker makes two references a "sudden" change in how they see—and experience—the world. It's as though the world momentarily reveals a profound but hard-to-grasp truth about its own wild variousness, and enjambment helps this realization appear on the page for the reader.

Look at the dramatic effect of the enjambment between lines 1 and 2, for example:

The room was suddenly rich and the great bay-
window was
Spawning snow and pink roses against it

The awkward line-break after "was" creates a moment of tension: "was" *what?* This, in turn, creates a bit of dramatic emphasis on the word "Spawning," which fits with how the snow seems to be so "suddenly" there. It's like the window "spawns" line 2 just as it "spawns" the snow itself.

The enjambment between lines 6-8 is also evocative:

I peel and portion
A tangerine and spit the pips and feel
The drunkenness of things being various.

These line breaks help divide the speaker's actions into distinct units. This is similar to what the speaker is doing with the tangerine itself—dividing it into smaller segments that [symbolically](#) represent the variety and complexity of the world.

Where Enjambment appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-2:** "was / Spawning"
- **Lines 2-3:** "it / Soundlessly"
- **Lines 6-7:** "portion / A"
- **Lines 7-8:** "feel / The"
- **Lines 9-10:** "world / Is"

JUXTAPOSITION

It's fair to say that [juxtaposition](#) is the inspiration behind the poem itself. In fact, Macneice [uses the word himself to describe the poem](#): "this is the direct record of a direct experience, the realization of a very obvious fact, that one thing is different from another – a fact which everyone knows but few people perhaps have had it brought home to them in this particular way, i. e. through the sudden violent perception of snow and roses juxtaposed."

The visual disparity—that is, the sheer *difference*—between the white snow and the pink roses is what leads to the speaker's sudden awakening. The snow and roses are totally distinct, and yet they're "collateral"—existing side by side. Their contrast speaks to the idea that the world is made of a seemingly limitless amount of individual components. The snow and roses are also divided by a window, of course, further emphasizing the fact that they're "incompatible"—that is, that they don't go together. The fire blazing indoors supports this juxtaposition by making it seem cold outside and warm in the room.

The speaker seems to find this juxtaposition to represent both a miracle and a threat (the world is "more spiteful and gay" than people think). The snow and roses are separate yet part of the same world, and the poem thus considers whether they represent unity or a kind of division.

Where Juxtaposition appears in the poem:

- **Lines 2-3:** "Spawning snow and pink roses against it / Soundlessly collateral and incompatible:"
- **Line 9:** "And the fire flames with a bubbling sound"
- **Line 12:** "There is more than glass between the snow and the huge roses."

PERSONIFICATION

The poem [personifies](#) the world itself, making it seem like a complex, almost mischievous character. The speaker can't quite believe the world exists in the way that it does—all that incredible variety!—and so gives it a kind of personality. In lines 4-6, for example, the speaker says:

World is suddener than we fancy it.
World is crazier and more of it than we think,
Incorrigibly plural. [...]

Notice how there is no definite article here—it's not "*the* world."

"World" acts like a name. And this world also seems impish and unpredictable, stubborn and various. It's as though the world reveals a hint of its secrets, and then intentionally holds the rest back.

In line 10, the speaker develops this personification by calling the world "more spiteful and gay than one supposes"—that is, both more hateful *and* cheerful. Of course, this also might be read as [metonymy](#) rather than true personification, with "world" here standing in for society, nature, the earth, and so forth.

Finally, the "great bay-window" is treated as alive in the poem's opening lines—as something that can "spawn" like a frog or fish. This is a metaphor for the way the snow looks falling outside the window, but it also creates the sense of the world being a deeply interconnected place.

Where Personification appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-2:** "the great bay-window was / Spawning snow"
- **Lines 5-6:** "World is crazier / and more of it than we think, / Incorporrigibly plural."
- **Lines 9-10:** "world / Is more spiteful and gay than one supposes—"

REPETITION

"Snow" uses a few different kinds of [repetition](#): [anaphora](#), [polysyndeton](#), and [parallelism](#).

The first of these, anaphora, appears in lines 4 and 5, connecting the first and second stanzas and reflecting the speaker's sense of wonder. It's like the speaker has just struck philosophical gold, catching a fleeting glimpse of the true nature of reality—or, at least, how human consciousness tends to misperceive it:

World is suddener than we fancy it.
World is crazier and more of it than we think,

The grammar here is clear and simple, the repetition giving this section a touch of drama and forcefulness. It's like the speaker tugging the reader on the sleeve and saying, "Look, can't you see what I'm seeing!?" The anaphora also adds weight to the word "World" itself, which is, in a way, the subject of the poem.

In the next lines, the speaker uses polysyndeton while talking about eating a tangerine—here, a [symbol](#) of "things being various:"

[...] I peel **and** portion
A tangerine **and** spit the pips **and** feel

The polysyndeton here makes the speaker's actions feel both separate and connected. The speaker methodically lays out each step, one by one, but all these steps are still part of the

same long sentence. The polysyndeton thus speaks to the incredible way that the world seems to be one whole thing—the *world*—and a seemingly endless parade of individual elements (e.g., a chair, a dog, etc.)

Line 11 achieves a similar effect through parallelism (which, as previously noted in this guide, overlaps here with [asyndeton](#)):

On the tongue on the eyes on the ears in the palms of
one's hands—

This repetitive phrasing connects the different senses, urging the reader to acknowledge these fine instruments through which human beings experience the world.

Where Repetition appears in the poem:

- **Line 4:** "World is"
- **Line 5:** "World is"
- **Lines 6-7:** "I peel and portion / A tangerine and spit the pips and feel"
- **Line 9:** "And"
- **Line 11:** "On the tongue on the eyes on the ears in the palms of one's hands—"



VOCABULARY

Bay-window (Line 1) - A type of window that protrudes outwardly from a building.

Spawning (Line 2) - Giving birth to/creating.

Incompatible (Line 3) - Impossible to combine or irreconcilable. If two things are incompatible then they can't exist together.

Collateral (Line 3) - Side-by-side or descendent from a common ancestor through differing lines.

Suddener (Line 4) - More immediate and present.

Fancy (Line 4) - Imagine.

Incorrigibly (Line 6) - Stubbornly made up of and/or containing many different elements; full of variety.

Pips (Line 7) - Small seeds.

For (Line 9) - Because.

Gay (Line 10) - Happy/cheerful.

Spiteful (Line 10) - Hateful/mean.



FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"Snow" consists of three four-line stanzas (a.k.a [quatrains](#)). Perhaps the simplicity of the quatrain form relates to the

poem's main idea: that the world is both *the world* (one entity) and made up of seemingly limitless separate elements. The division of the poem into stanzas might speak to the "in corrigibl[e] plural[ity]" of the world. The stanzas are like segments of the tangerine: individual pieces that when put together they make a single poem.

METER

The poem doesn't use any regular [meter](#) and is best described as being written in [free verse](#).

That said, many lines feature five **stressed** beats (and others close to that, with four or six). Listen to the second stanza, for example:

World is crazier and more of it than we think,
In corrigibly plural. I peel and portion
A tangerine and spit the pips and feel
The drunkenness of things being various.

It's thus possible to think of the poem as using a rough accentual meter, but, to be fair, the stressed beats above are subjective and other readers might scan things differently. This unpredictable sound gives the poem a sense of spontaneity and dynamism, which is kept in check by the regularity of the stanza form (those steady [quatrains](#)). This speaks to the mood of the poem, which is one of epiphany and breathless wonder at the complexity of the world. Neat rhythms would probably feel too ordered and unsuited to the subject at hand.

RHYME SCHEME

As a [free verse](#) poem, "Snow" doesn't use a regular [rhyme scheme](#). As with the lack of predictable [meter](#), this feels appropriate for a poem all about the dizzying and surprising variety and "crazi[ness]" of the world.

That said, there is a clear [end rhyme](#) in the last stanza though. Line 10's "supposes" chimes neatly with line 12's "roses." This gives the poem a satisfying sound and adds a bit of emphasis and drama to its conclusion.



SPEAKER

It's possible to read the speaker of "Snow" as simply being the poet, Louis MacNeice. That said, the speaker is never actually identified in the poem itself. In fact, exactly *who* the speaker is doesn't really matter; it's the way the speaker's *worldview* suddenly changes that counts. The speaker could be anyone—any one of *us*—just going about their daily life when, suddenly, the world reveals itself in all its stubborn, wonderful, irreducible complexity. The speaker feels changed by this experience and presumes that most people, most of the time, don't recognize the strangeness of the world in which they live.



SETTING

The poem takes place on a snowy day. The speaker sees the snow from a room that by all accounts sounds pretty cosy and comfortable: it has a "great bay-window" and a fire "bubbling" away in the hearth. There are "pink roses," against this window as well, which provide a striking contrast with the cold, white snow. In fact, it's the sight of the snow alongside those roses that makes the scene become suddenly "rich" for the speaker. That is, the stark visual [juxtaposition](#) between the snow and the roses casts the entire world in a new light. The speaker realizes how diverse, strange, and connected the world is, and this realization depends in large part on the poem's setting.

And yet, there is also a sense that the world never fully reveals itself in the poem. There is "more than glass between the snow and the huge roses," but what the "more" is exactly remains unsaid. This adds to the poem's sense of mystery and wonder.



CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

"Snow" is an early work by Irish poet Louis MacNeice, first published in 1935 in a collection simply titled *Poems*. It was reputedly inspired by MacNeice's visit to the house of his friend and classical scholar E.R. Dodds. According to Dodds, the roses, tangerine, and snow are all real details from this visit.

MacNeice belonged to a group of writers known (perhaps unfairly) as the Auden Group, named after W.H. Auden, one of the most prominent 20th-century literary figures. Shortly after "Snow," MacNeice wrote "[Autumn Journal](#)," a long and celebrated autobiographical poem that expresses worry about the 1930s political landscape. Perhaps the focus of "Snow" on division and connection hints at MacNeice's later exploration of topical issues such as the looming threat of war. "Snow" has been named as an important influence by several poets and is specifically referenced in Paul Muldoon's "[History](#)." The simplicity of the poem itself (there are no lofty references or elaborate [metaphors](#), for example) suggests that the "drunkenness of things being various" is something to which everyone has access.

That said, the poem has also been the subject of extensive critical debate, which can be broken down into two basic views:

- "Snow" is a deeply philosophical poem that examines the relationship between the individual and the masses, between the subject (the "I") and the Other.
- "Snow" is the simple relation of an immediate, sensory experience.

This debate, in turn, has been taken to more broadly represent

an argument over whether poetic analysis is too often overly intellectualized. Of course, readers might prefer to see "Snow" as a mixture of both ideas! MacNeice himself had this to say of the poem:

[I]t means exactly what it says; the images here are not voices off, they are bang centre stage, for this is the direct record of a direct experience, the realization of a very obvious fact, that one thing is different from another—a fact which everyone knows but few people perhaps have had it brought home to them in this particular way, i. e. through the sudden violent perception of snow and roses juxtaposed.

Readers might also check out MacNeice's poem "[Plurality](#)" for another take on a similar subject.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The 1930s were a time of increasing fear and foreboding for Europe. Fascism and ultra-nationalism were on the rise, with Adolf Hitler coming to power in Germany in 1933. The utter devastation of the First World War was not long in the past, and there was a sense, particularly among artists, writers, and so on, that the notion of human progress was a kind of myth.

MacNeice argued in his 1938 work of poetry criticism/theory, *Modern Poetry*, in favor of *impure* poetry—that is, poetry conditioned by the poet's life and the world around him. This poem's engagement with the world, though, seems more immediate and sensory than determined by its era, and is in a long tradition of art and philosophy that attempts nothing less than to understand the nature of reality itself.



MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- "[On Louis MacNeice](#)" — Listen to a podcast created by the London Review of Books about MacNeice's life and work. (<https://www.lrb.co.uk/podcasts-and-videos/podcasts/close-readings/on-louis-macneice>)
- [MacNeice's Bioragphy](#) — Learn more about MacNeice's life story via the Poetry Foundation. (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/louis-macneice>)
- [MacNeice in Print and Portrait](#) — Check out some images of the poet himself. (<https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/person/mp09538/frederick-louis-macneice>)
- [MacNeice and the BBC](#) — Listen to a short piece by poet Paul Muldoon that looks at MacNeice's work as a radio producer. (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b04d0k15>)

LITCHARTS ON OTHER LOUIS MACNEICE POEMS

- [Prayer Before Birth](#)



HOW TO CITE

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