

Meter in Stevens's "The Snow Man"

- w s w w s w s w
 1 One must have a mind of winter
 o B o B o B o
 w w s w s w w s
 2 To regard the frost and the boughs
 o B o B o B
 w w s w s w w s
 3 Of the pine-trees crusted with snow;
 o B o B o B
- w w w s w s s
 4 And have been cold a long time
 B o B o B
 -
 w w s w s w w s w s
 5 To behold the junipers shagged with ice,
 o B o B o B o B
 w s w s w w s w s w
 6 The spruces rough in the distant glitter
 o B o B o B o B o
- w w s w s w s w s w s
 7 Of the January sun; and not to think
 o B o B o B o B
 w s w s w w w s w w s
 8 Of any misery in the sound of the wind,
 o B o B -o- B o B
 w w s w w s s
 9 In the sound of a few leaves,
 o B o B o B
- w w w s w w s
 10 Which is the sound of the land
 o B o B

s w w s s
 11 Full of the same wind
 B o B o B
 w w s w w w s s s
 12 That is blowing in the same bare place
 o B o B o B
 w w s w w w s w w w s
 13 For the listener, who listens in the snow,
 o B o B o B o B
 w s w w s w s -
 14 And, nothing himself, beholds
 o B o B o B
 s w w w s s w w s w w s
 15 Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.
 B o B o B o B o B

REMARKS

The poem does not have a traditional meter. However, in my reading it has a fairly steady alternating rising oBoBoB(oB)(o) rhythm, with one or two syllables in the offbeats, and allowing up to three weak syllables to fill an offbeat in a few places (10, 15) and possibly four once (8, where I wrote -o-). The opening stanza sets us up to expect three beats in a line, but there are a lot of longer lines (5, 6, 7, 8, 13, 15), the longest of which (7, 8?, 15) probably have five beats.

My scansion is certainly not the only possibility for many of the lines. Some choices depend on performance and emphasis, starting with line 1: **One** must have a mind?

Interpretively, I'd say there are quite a few notable moments that invite heavy pauses. There's a lot of open space in the poem for you to listen to, like the "listener" who has to listen for "the nothing that is." Even more could be said by considering the relationship between listening and beholding here in relation to what is heard and what is seen on the page.