

# Robert Service Cremation Of Sam McGee

## THE CREMATION of SAM MCGEE

by Robert W. Service



There are strange things done in the midnight sun  
By the men who moil for gold;  
The Arctic trails have their secret tales  
That would make your blood run cold;  
The Northern Lights have seen queer sights,  
But the queerest they ever did see  
Was that night on the marge of Lake Lebarge  
I cremated Sam McGee.

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**Robert Service cremation of Sam McGee** is a captivating tale that intertwines themes of friendship, death, and the harsh realities of life in the Yukon Gold Rush. The poem "The Cremation of Sam McGee," written by Robert Service in 1907, has become one of the most celebrated pieces of literature in Canadian culture. This article delves into the poem's background, themes, and enduring legacy, while exploring the cultural significance of Service's work.

# Background of Robert Service

Robert Service was born on January 16, 1874, in Preston, England. He immigrated to Canada in 1894, eventually settling in the Yukon Territory during the Klondike Gold Rush. His experiences in the Yukon heavily influenced his writing, and he quickly became known for his vivid depictions of life in the North.

## The Life of Robert Service

- Early Life: Service grew up in a middle-class family and showed an early interest in literature and poetry.
- Move to Canada: Seeking adventure and opportunity, he moved to Canada at the age of 20, where he worked various jobs before finding his passion for poetry.
- Yukon Experience: His time in the Yukon, particularly during the Gold Rush, provided him with rich material that he would later use in his poems.

## The Poem: "The Cremation of Sam McGee"

"The Cremation of Sam McGee" is a narrative poem that tells the story of a prospector named Sam McGee, who succumbs to the extreme cold of the Yukon. His friend, the narrator, promises to fulfill McGee's final wish of being cremated, leading to a series of darkly humorous and chilling events.

## Summary of the Poem

The poem begins with the narrator recounting how Sam McGee, originally from Tennessee, found himself in the frigid Yukon. The harsh conditions weigh heavily on him, and he asks the narrator to promise that he will be cremated after his death.

- The Promise: Sam's deteriorating health forces him to confront death, and he makes the narrator promise to carry out his wishes.
- The Journey: After Sam dies, the narrator struggles to keep his promise. He takes Sam's body on a difficult journey to find a suitable place for cremation.
- The Climax: Eventually, the narrator finds an abandoned cabin, where he prepares to cremate Sam. However, upon opening the coffin, he discovers that Sam's body is missing, leading to a surprising twist.

## Thematic Elements

The poem explores several key themes:

- Friendship and Loyalty: The narrator's commitment to fulfill Sam's dying wish highlights the bond between friends, even in the face of death.
- The Harshness of Nature: The extreme cold and unforgiving landscape of the Yukon serve as a backdrop for the poem, emphasizing the struggle for survival.
- Death and Mortality: The poem addresses the inevitability of death and the lengths to which one might go to honor the wishes of a loved one.
- Dark Humor: Service employs dark humor throughout the poem, creating a juxtaposition between the macabre topic of cremation and the light-hearted storytelling.

## Cultural Impact of "The Cremation of Sam McGee"

Robert Service's poem has left an indelible mark on Canadian literature and culture. It has been widely studied, referenced, and performed, demonstrating its lasting relevance.

## Literary Significance

- Influence on Canadian Poetry: Service's work has inspired countless poets and writers, particularly those who focus on themes of nature and the human experience.
- Anthologized Work: "The Cremation of Sam McGee" is often included in Canadian literature anthologies and is studied in schools, making it a staple of Canadian education.

## Adaptations and Performances

The poem's vivid imagery and engaging storytelling have led to various adaptations:

- Theatrical Productions: Numerous stage adaptations have been created, bringing Service's words to life for audiences.
- Musical Interpretations: The poem has inspired songwriters, leading to musical adaptations that capture its essence.
- Film and Media: The story has been referenced and adapted in various films and documentaries, showcasing its cultural relevance.

# Conclusion

The legacy of **Robert Service cremation of Sam McGee** continues to resonate with audiences today. Through its rich themes and engaging narrative, the poem captures the spirit of the Yukon and the complexities of human relationships. Service's ability to blend humor with the stark realities of life and death has secured "The Cremation of Sam McGee" a lasting place in the canon of Canadian literature. Whether experienced in the classroom, on stage, or through music, this poem remains a powerful reminder of the bonds of friendship and the inevitability of mortality.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **What is the main theme of 'The Cremation of Sam McGee' by Robert Service?**

The main theme of 'The Cremation of Sam McGee' is the juxtaposition of life and death, as well as the exploration of friendship and loyalty in the face of harsh conditions in the Yukon wilderness.

### **Why is the setting of the Yukon important in 'The Cremation of Sam McGee'?**

The Yukon setting is crucial as it emphasizes the extreme cold and isolation faced by the characters, enhancing the poem's themes of survival and the struggle against nature.

### **How does Robert Service use humor in 'The Cremation of Sam McGee'?**

Service uses dark humor throughout the poem, especially in the way he describes Sam's cremation and the absurdity of the situation, which adds a layer of irony to the grim subject matter.

### **What literary devices are prominent in 'The Cremation of Sam McGee'?**

Prominent literary devices in the poem include personification, vivid imagery, and rhyme, which contribute to its engaging narrative and emotional impact.

### **What can be inferred about the relationship between the narrator and Sam McGee?**

The relationship between the narrator and Sam McGee suggests a deep sense of camaraderie and commitment, as the narrator goes to great lengths to honor

Sam's last wishes despite the challenges.

## How has 'The Cremation of Sam McGee' influenced popular culture?

The poem has influenced popular culture through adaptations in music, theater, and visual arts, and its memorable lines and themes continue to resonate in discussions about life, death, and adventure.

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Discover the haunting tale of Robert Service's "Cremation of Sam McGee." Uncover its themes and

legacy. Learn more about this iconic poem today!

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