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Cover

Chinese scroll owned by Wallace Stevens
Courtesy of Peter Hanchak

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Chinese Landscape Painting in Stevens' "Six Significant Landscapes"

ZHAOMING QIAN

IN *PICTURE THEORY* (1994) W. J. T. Mitchell refers to Wallace Stevens' "Anecdote of the Jar" as a "pure example" of ekphrasis (166), the literary mode defined by James Heffernan as "*the verbal representation of visual representation*" (3). "Anecdote of the Jar" (1919) certainly is not Stevens' first experiment with ekphrasis. Several of his earlier poems—section I of "Six Significant Landscapes" (1916), "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" (1917), and section III of "Le Monocle de Mon Oncle" (1918)—may serve as excellent examples of the genre whose central goal, according to Mitchell, is " 'the overcoming of otherness,' " that is, "those rival, alien modes of representation called the visual, graphic, plastic, or 'spatial' arts" (156). One thing strikes us at once: all three earlier poems signify Stevens' effort to represent otherness in an intricate way. What he seeks to explore includes not only passage to the other genre (the visual) but also passage to the other age (the past) and the other culture (the Orient). His endeavor to cross genre, age, and culture at the same time is best exemplified by section I of "Six Significant Landscapes," a verbalized depiction of Song Chinese landscape painting:

An old man sits
In the shadow of a pine tree
In China.
He sees larkspur,
Blue and white,
At the edge of the shadow,
Move in the wind.
His beard moves in the wind.
The pine tree moves in the wind.
Thus water flows
Over weeds. (CP 73)

In this poem, Chinese landscape painting is represented in several ways: by focus on a single point of sight ("An old man" gazing out forever at those gazing at him); by choice of subject of all that is most elemental in nature and in Chinese landscape painting ("a pine tree," "larkspur,"

“wind,” “water,” and “weeds”); by reliance on a few simple strokes of description (five simple sentences without subordinate clauses); and by an almost monochrome tonality of gray and blue and white (“shadow” and “Blue and white”) that is known to have dominated Chinese landscape painting in the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries. The repetition of “Move in the wind” (“moves in the wind”) in the last five lines emphasizes only too obviously the painting’s power of showing motion in “still life” and turning every object, including the lone figure, into an integral part of the immense cosmos. There is a deep abiding joy that tranquilizes and uplifts. The poem, like the Chinese painting it represents, portrays a single impression: consciousness of the unity of all created things. In A. Walton Litz’s description, “Here nothing is wasted: the mosaic of images, one superimposed upon the other in the mind of the reader, makes a complex statement on the paradox of permanence within change” (39–40).

For those who are familiar with Chinese art, the style and sentiment presented here really recall a particular school of Chinese landscape painting—the Southern Song (or Late Song) landscape painting that flourished in the late twelfth to the thirteenth centuries A.D. The work of this school is valued today especially for its power of illustrating obtuse and enigmatic aesthetic beliefs shared by Taoists and Chan Buddhists.¹ Prior to 1916 when “Six Significant Landscapes” first appeared, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and Mr. Charles Freer of Detroit (whose collection was later bequeathed to the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.) had already assembled a considerable number of landscape paintings by prominent figures of this school, such as Ma Yuan and Xia Gui.² Their scroll paintings are characterized precisely by impressionistic and fragmentary depiction of trees, hills, streams, and lone figures, by sweeping strokes of the brush that suggest the most with the simplest means, by the faintest application of color, and by means of expression for the artist’s sentiment. A single man in the midst of rippling pine trees, weeds, and waters in a Ma Yuan or a Xia Gui is enough to awaken in the mind of the viewer a sense of ease, leisure, and contentment, or, to borrow a term from the renowned Chan scholar Daisetz Suzuki, the Chan-Buddhist sense of “the Alone” (22).

In less than three years (February 1919), Stevens was to purchase from a Boston bookstore a copy of the Rev. Samuel Beal’s *Buddhism in China* (1884) and to read it with great gusto. His copy of the book, now housed in the Huntington Library, is filled with his marginal markings. A passage that refers to a certain contemplative school of Chinese Buddhists, for instance, is marked out with a bold vertical line and a star in the left margin:

This priest belonged to the Lin-tsi branch of the contemplative school of Chinese Buddhists. With them the essence of religion is quietism; to have no strong belief on any point except the

necessity of virtue and good conduct,—the rest will adjust itself. (Beal 198)

In the upper left of the front endpaper is Stevens' characteristic inscription:

W. Stevens
Boston
Feb. 12, 1919

At the end of the book's index is his notation, "The Awakened 83" (Beal 263), which singles out for attention a passage on page 83 that deals with the Chan Buddhist ideal of "the Awakened":

Then comes the climax. "Bodhisattva now remained in peaceful quiet; the morning sunbeams brighten with the dawn; the dusk-like mist, dispersing, disappears; the moon and stars pale their faint light; the barriers of the night are all removed; whilst from the above a fall of heavenly flowers pay their sweet tribute to the Bodhisattva." Then, passing through successive stages of rapt ecstasy, he traces back all suffering to the one cause of ignorance (*avidya*), that is, absence of light, and then himself attains the great awakened state of "perfect light." Thus did he complete the end of "self"; as fire goes out for want of grass, thus he had done what he would have men do; he first had found the way of perfect knowledge, then lustrous with all-wisdom, the great *rishi* sat, perfect in gifts, whilst one convulsive throe shook the wide earth. This is the condition of the Buddha, or the awakened, and by this name henceforth he is to be called. (Beal 82–83)

To our amazement, in Stevens' 1916 version of a Chinese landscape painting, this sense of "the Awakened," which Suzuki refers to as "the Alone," is well captured: we as readers are given an opportunity to feel the breathing of nature and to become one with it.

If Chinese landscape painting aiming to communicate the spirit of the Chan or the Tao has a traditional scene, this is it. First of all, the old man in Stevens' ekphrastic poem, as in the kind of Song landscape painting it endeavors to emulate, appears sitting in meditation, that is, in a state of active tranquillity that opens the way to Enlightenment. Note, by the way, that the old Chinese in section III of "Le Monocle de Mon Oncle" appear sitting in meditation also: they "Sat tittivating by their mountain pools" (CP 14). Second, the figure is shown to be perfectly in harmony with nature. The larkspur he gazes at may provide the shock that brings Enlightenment. The man who sees the larkspur moving in the wind suddenly, in the flash of a single thought, is no longer aware of himself. He is that larkspur, the larkspur that reveals universal reality. When the artist paints

the landscape, the essential breath is discharged through his brush: he captures it in its dazzling “suchness.”³ Third, the flowing water in the scene is a perfect symbol of Tao. As the *Dao de jing* (*Tao Te Ching*), the single most important text of Taoism, teaches, “The sage’s way, Tao, is the way of water. There must be water for life to be, and it can flow wherever. And water, being true to being water, is true to Tao” (Laozi, *The Illustrated Tao Te Ching* 41). Finally, the wind in the scene is just another symbol of Tao. According to the *Dao de jing*, “The Great Tao goes everywhere past your left hand and your right—filling the whole of space. It is breath to every thing, and yet it asks for nothing back; it feeds and creates everything, but it will never tell you so” (93).

In this light, it is not surprising that Stevens’ image of “An old man . . . / In the shadow of a . . . tree” is to be seen in numerous Chinese landscape paintings of the Southern Song period and thereafter. The New York collector C. C. Wang, for instance, owned an album leaf by Ma Yuan, which is now in the collection of Mr. and Mrs. A. Dean Perry, Cleveland, showing a scholar with a servant on a terrace beneath a pine tree gazing out into flowing waters (fig. 1). He sees bamboo leaves, gray and white, at the edge of the water, move in the wind. The pine tree moves in the wind. Thus water flows over rocks. In the Boston Museum of Fine Arts is a hanging scroll attributed to Lu Xinzong, another Southern Song painter, por-



Fig. 1. Ma Yuan (active 1190 to after 1225), *A Scholar and His Servant on a Terrace*
 Album leaf, ink and light color on silk, 9 ¾ x 10 ¼"
 Courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. A. Dean Perry Collection, Cleveland

traying a Luohan (a Buddhist saint who remains in the human world) sitting in the shadow of a willow tree contemplating a lotus pond (fig. 2). He sees lotus, pink and white, in the pond, move in the wind. The willow tree moves in the wind. Thus water flows in the lotus pond. Evidently there is Buddhist poetry in both paintings.⁴ Likewise, the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., houses among its Song exhibits two valuable handscrolls, one attributed to Ma Yuan representing an old man admiring rising waters in a pavilion in the shadow of two tall pine trees and the other attributed to Xia Gui delineating two old men sitting side by side viewing waterfalls under a huge tree.

More examples of landscape paintings repeating this theme are to be found in books on Far Eastern art. Ernest Fenollosa, in *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art* (1912), a work Stevens might have gone through between 1912 and 1916, presents two: one attributed to the Song emperor Huizong (fig. 3)⁵ and the other by Xia Gui. It is worth quoting Fenollosa's version of a little poem given below Xia Gui's image: "Where my pathway came to an end by the rising waters covered, I sat me down to

watch the shapes in the mist that over it hovered" (42) (fig. 4).⁶ Also, in *The Illustrated Tao Te Ching*, a 1993 version of Laozi's influential treatise that Stevens could not possibly have seen, the illustration for the saying "The Tao is the breath that never dies" (37) is precisely an old man in the shadow of a pine tree gazing out onto a flowing stream. So is the illustration for the saying, "The sage's way, Tao, is the way of water. . . . [W]ater, you know, never fights; it flows around without harm" (41).

One painting that matches Stevens' poem to the smallest detail, however, is the handscroll *A Sage Under a Pine Tree*, a thirteenth-century imitation of a masterpiece formerly attributed to Ma Yuan (fig. 5). This painting is "a synthesis of exceptional concentration," to borrow a phrase from Stevens (NA 164), and has been in the Metropolitan Museum of Art ever since 1923. Though the treasure is not publicly displayed except on rare occasions, its image appears in numerous books on Chinese art. Indeed,

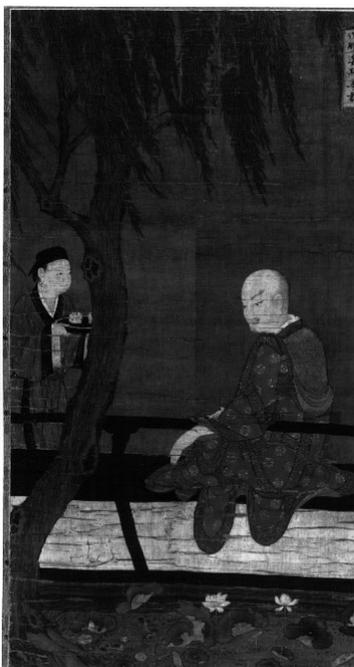


Fig. 2. Attributed to Lu Xinzong (mid-thirteenth century), detail from *A Luohan Contemplating a Lotus Pond*

Hanging scroll mounted as panel; ink, color, and gold on silk, 31 ½ x 16 ¼"

William Sturgis Bigelow Collection
Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts,
Boston



Fig. 3. Attributed to Huizong (1082–1135), *A Scholar Seated Under a Pine Tree*
Reproduced from Ernest Fenollosa, *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*, Vol. 2 (1912)

The poem is, therefore, more likely to have been inspired by stored images,⁷ that is, Stevens' reminiscence of other Chinese landscape paintings repeating Ma Yuan's favorite theme. He might have seen one example of this tradition with admiration, and then another and another, in books and in art galleries. As he observes in his 1951 article on "The Relations between Poetry and Painting," "The mind retains experience, so that long after the experience . . . that faculty within us of which I have spoken makes its own constructions out of that experience" (NA 164). Here his theorizing sounds like Chan. Several facts appear to point to the truth of my assumption. First, as an enthusiastic admirer of Chinese landscape painting, Stevens went to quite a few exhibitions of Far Eastern art in Boston and New York during the years 1897–1916. Second, his interest in Oriental art spurred him to study the subject extensively in 1908–1909. Third, in his reading and viewing of Chinese art his taste appeared specially for Song landscape painting that illustrates the Tao or the Chan with "unnatural" clarity.

many may recognize it as the cover art for a volume of the Norton series of anthologies, *Masterpieces of the Orient*, edited by G. L. Anderson.

As can be seen, in the painting the invisible wind really becomes visible with the rhythmical movements of the pine tree, the weeds, the water, and the old man's beard. The flower that captivates the figure does not look like larkspur though, but Stevens could have taken it as such, if he indeed had this image in mind while composing the poem. On 25 July 1915, it may be remembered, Stevens was attracted toward some larkspur from China in the Botanical Garden of New York, and in a letter of that evening to his wife, he remarked, "I was able to impress on myself that larkspur comes from China. Was there ever anything more Chinese when you stop to think of it?" (L 184).

However, according to the records of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the handscroll *A Sage Under a Pine Tree* entered its collection in 1923. Research uncovers no evidence that the work was ever on loan to it prior to that date.



LANDSCAPE BY KAKEI (Hsia Kuei).

**“ Where my pathway came to an
end by the rising waters covered,
I sat me down to watch the shapes
in the mist that over it hovered.”**

Fig. 4. Attributed to Xia Gui (active 1180–1224), *Landscape*
Reproduced from Ernest Fenollosa, *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*, Vol. 2 (1912)

Joan Richardson believes that Stevens' preoccupation with Oriental art was stimulated by his conversations with Arthur Pope, Witter Bynner, and Arthur Davison Ficke. She speculates, "Together they no doubt commented on pieces Fenollosa had gathered for the Oriental Collection at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts" (62). This is quite possible. During the years 1897–1900, the great Oriental collections of William Sturgis Bigelow and Charles Goddard Weld (which included the Fenollosa collection) were on permanent display.⁸ Stevens and his Harvard schoolmates who shared a keen interest in Oriental art must have visited the Museum of Fine Arts during their college years and their visual exchanges with China and Japan must have begun in the Museum of Fine Art's Oriental Wing. In fact, I must add, Stevens' three friends all became enthusiasts about Oriental art in their later careers. Arthur Pope, who lived with Stevens at 54 Garden Street in Cambridge, joined the faculty of Fine Arts at Harvard. He freely used Oriental artworks to illustrate his books on art. Among his illustrations for *The Language of Drawing and Painting*, for example, are five Song paintings from the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and one Ming portrait and two Japanese prints from the Fogg Art Museum at Harvard. In 1945 he was appointed the third director of the Fogg Art Museum, which boasted one of America's finest Oriental collections. Witter Bynner, who used to eat midnight buckwheat cakes with Stevens at a restaurant in

Harvard Square called Ramsden's or " 'Rammy's' " (SP 67), traveled to China and Japan in 1917 and to China again in 1920–21. In early March 1909 when he and Stevens had dinner together at the Players Club in New York, the most exhilarating topic of their conversation was Oriental prints. Arthur Davison Ficke, "a great conversationalist" on the topic of Oriental prints (Gladys B. Ficke's phrase in her 1958 preface to *Chats* [8]), published a book called *Chats on Japanese Prints* in 1915. He took trips to China and Japan together with Bynner in 1917, and upon return turned himself into a distinguished collector of Oriental prints.

In his New York years, moreover, Stevens kept going to various exhibitions of Chinese and Japanese art. As his journal and correspondence reveal, in mid-March 1909 he saw "an exhibition . . . all from the Chinese, painted centuries ago" (L 137). On 2 January 1911, he "went into the American Art Galleries, where, among other things, they [were] showing some Chinese and Japanese jades and porcelains" (L 169). Stevens is known as a frequenter of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In a letter of 10 January 1909 to Elsie, for instance, he refers to the Museum's German pictures (L 116–17) and in a letter of 11 August 1912 to his wife he refers to its Flemish room (L 176). During these and subsequent visits, he could have ventured into the Far Eastern Room and seen various landscape paintings copying Ma Yuan's timeless motif. By 1913 the Metropolitan Museum of Art had acquired, among other pieces, Xia Gui's album leaf *Landscape*, the handscroll *Landscape in the Style of Guo Xi*, and, above all, the hanging

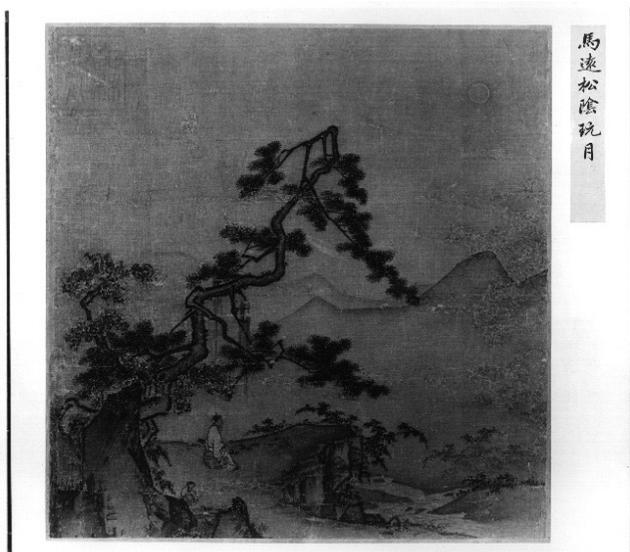


Fig. 5. Formerly attributed to Ma Yuan, *A Sage Under a Pine Tree*
Handscroll, ink and light color on silk, 10 x 10"
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1923. (23.33.5)

scroll *Scholar Under a Tree in Autumn* (fig. 6), a Ming (1368–1644) copy of Ma Yuan’s famous theme.

Also, Stevens may have visited other exhibitions of Chinese art in New York and its vicinity. Several of these got a great deal of publicity in the media. In March and April 1909, for instance, a professor and private collector of Chinese and Japanese art, Isaac Taylor Headland, had his remarkable collection of Chinese paintings displayed first at the Century Club and then at the galleries of the Pratt Institute Library Building, Brooklyn. In early March 1916, a matter of weeks before Stevens’ version of a Song landscape painting appeared in *Others*, and a period during which he might have been writing *Three Travelers Watch a Sunrise*, an impressive exhibition of Chinese, Japanese, and Persian paintings was shown at the Bourgeois Gallery. Its prize was a large Song painting signed by Li Tang (said to have been a mentor of Ma Yuan), showing a sage and his followers on a mountainside in a landscape diversified by trees and streams with waterfalls. Thus was the scroll described in the *New York Times* (5 March 1916).

The museum that boasted “the finest collection of oriental art under one roof in the world” was, nevertheless, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (Okakura’s phrase, qtd. in Fontein 6). Between 1905 and 1913, Kakuzo Okakura (1862–1913), as successor of Fenollosa and curator of the Department of Asiatic Art (then the Department of Japanese Art), made an extraordinary effort to consolidate this reputation by acquiring among other things many more Song and Kamakura-Muromachi (fourteenth- to fifteenth-century Japanese) paintings. These included such masterpieces as the hanging scroll *A Luohan Contemplating a Lotus Pond* referred to earlier, the handscroll *Clear Weather in the Valley* formerly attributed to the Northern (or Early) Song painter Dong Yuan (907–960), Ma Yuan’s round album leaf *Bare Willows and Distant Mountains*, and the Muromachi painter Bunsei’s hanging scroll *Landscape* (fig. 7). John Gould Fletcher, who visited the Boston Museum of Fine Arts in 1914, was so overwhelmed by its



Fig. 6. Anonymous (Ming Period, 1368–1644), *Scholar Under a Tree in Autumn*
Hanging scroll, ink and light color on silk, 88 ¼ x 48"
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
John Stewart Kennedy Fund, 1913.
(13.220.8)



Fig. 7 Bunsei (active mid-fifteenth century), *Landscape*
Hanging scroll, ink and light color on paper, 29 x 13"
Chinese and Japanese Special Fund
Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts,
Boston

notes into his journal. These included passages from Kakuso Okakura's *The Ideals of the East* (1903) and Laurence Binyon's *Painting in the Far East* (1908). It was Okakura's *The Ideals of the East* rather than Beal's *Buddhism in China* that first introduced Stevens to Chan Buddhism. From *The Ideals of the East* he might have acquired an understanding of Neo-Confucianism, "an amalgamation of Taoist, Buddhist, and Confucian thought, acting chiefly . . . through the Taoist mind" (156); and of the Chan, "introduced into China" through India but thoroughly transformed by absorbing "Laoist [Taoist] ideas" (160). That Stevens had carefully read Okakura is evidenced by his sensible statement, "Kakuzo Okakura is a cultivated, but not an original thinker" (SP 221). He seemed to think more highly of

Oriental collection that after two decades he still cherished a wonderful memory of the experience and had this to say: "The hours I spent then in the Oriental Wing seeing the Sung or Kamakura masterpieces with new eyes, re-educated me in regard to the purposes of a pictorial art close in spirit to my own poetry, and to the function of the poetic artist in reshaping the world. They rededicated me to the vital instinct, and to the soul of nature" (185). To a considerable degree, Fletcher had spoken Stevens' mind. Since Stevens traveled to Boston so frequently during that period (September 1906, October 1907, September 1909 with his bride, etc.), we have reason to believe that he had returned to the Museum of Fine Arts for its Song and Kamakura additions and had seen Ma Yuan and his Chinese and Japanese followers with fresh eyes.

Further, according to Stevens' journal and correspondence, in the spring of 1909 he did considerable reading about Chinese art in New York's Astor Library, where, six years earlier, Ernest Fenollosa, also a Harvard graduate and America's leading Orientalist, studied the same subject.⁹ On 14 May 1909, Stevens copied what he considered to be essential of his Astor Library

Binyon, the British champion of Oriental art, in whom he found “a kind of sedateness . . . less than tranquillity” (SP 222), and from whose profusely illustrated *Painting in the Far East* he was able to learn a great deal more about Chinese landscape painting.

Interestingly, Pound and Stevens, who both came under the impact of Binyon’s *Painting in the Far East* in 1908–1909, were charmed by different things. In fact, it may be noted, in mid-to-late March 1909, while Stevens was going over *Painting in the Far East* in Astor Library, New York, Pound was attending Binyon’s lectures on “Art and Thought in East and West” illustrated by slides every Wednesday evening in the Albert Hall, Kensington, London,¹⁰ and their younger fellow modernist Marianne Moore, then a senior at Bryn Mawr, was attracted to the Oriental art exhibits of the University of Pennsylvania Museum.¹¹ Different from Pound, who showed a strong taste for Tang art and poetry (notably Wang Wei and Li Bo), Stevens preferred “the refinement of Sung [Song] society” to “the glory of the Tang emperors” (SP 221). Into his journal he entered nothing but things of the Song. Of a list of subjects about nature and landscape:

The Evening Bell from a Distant Temple
Sunset Glow over a Fishing Village
Fine Weather after Storm at a Lonely Mountain Town
Homeward-bound Boats off a Distant Coast
The Autumn Moon over Lake Tung-t’ing
Wild Geese on a Sandy Plain
Night Rain in Hsiao-Hsiang (SP 222)¹²

he noted, “it is so comprehensive. Any twilight picture is included” (L 138). This list, the “Eight Views of the Xiao and Xiang Rivers,” a traditional series of subjects passed down from the Song period, is found to be copied from Binyon’s *Painting in the Far East* (133). It might have inspired him to write “Eight Significant Landscapes” (see OP 21), later changed to “Six Significant Landscapes.” To the best of my knowledge, Pound, who probably viewed both Chinese and Japanese versions of the “Eight Views” in the British Museum around 1910, did not refer to these famous scenes until nearly two decades later when he sent for an old Japanese manuscript book of his relative’s with both verbal and visual imitations of the scenes and produced his own version of the “Eight Views” in his *Seven Lakes Canto*.¹³

And of a little landscape poem by the Song poet-essayist-economic reformer Wang Anshi (1021–1086), which he copied out for his fiancée Elsie on 18 March 1909—

“It is midnight; all is silent in the house; the water-clock has stopped. But I am unable to sleep because of the beauty of the

trembling shapes of the spring-flowers, thrown by the moon
upon the blind"¹⁴—

he remarked, "I don't know of anything more beautiful than that anywhere, or more Chinese." He was quite enchanted by its imagery: "I am going to poke around more or less in the dust of Asia for a week or two and have no idea what I shall disturb and bring to light. — Curious thing, how little we know about Asia, and all that. It makes me wild to learn it all in a night" (*L* 138). Indeed, this little poem by Wang Anshi lingered in Stevens' mind for many years. Its image of the moonlight appears to have contributed to his Cubist image of the starlight in section V of "Six Significant Landscapes":

Not all the knives of the lamp-posts,
Nor the chisels of the long streets,
Nor the mallets of the domes
And high towers,
Can carve
What one star can carve,
Shining through the grape-leaves. (*CP* 74–75)

Like sections I, II, III, and IV, this is a variation "on the 'anti-rational' theme of [section] VI":

Rationalists, wearing square hats,
Think, in square rooms,
Looking at the floor,
Looking at the ceiling.
They confine themselves
To right-angled triangles.
If they tried rhomboids,
Cones, waving lines, ellipses—
As, for example, the ellipse of the half-moon—
Rationalists would wear sombreros. (*CP* 75)

As Litz aptly notes, the first five sections are all meant to mock "those habits of mind and language which screen us away from new perceptions of things as they are" (30).

Binyon, in *Painting in the Far East*, also pays tribute to Ma Yuan, Xia Gui, and their precursor Guo Xi (1020–1077),¹⁵ whom he refers to as the three "pre-eminent landscape masters of Sung [Song]" (136). Of Guo Xi, the artist who inspired Ma Yuan and Xia Gui, Binyon observes that he "published an essay on landscape, in which . . . [he] insists on [the 'far-off effect'] as necessary to unity. . . . The painter must have varied experience, must build on incessant observation, he says, but above all things he must seize essentials and discard the trivial" (128). Largely due to his influence,

according to Binyon, the “Sung [Song] landscape is built up of tones rather than of lines. . . . The artists worked almost entirely in monochrome; and they chose for subject all that is most elemental and august in nature” (128–29). There is no indication as to how this remarkable account impressed Stevens in 1909. But two years later, on a summer day of 1911 (19 August perhaps), Stevens is found to have been fascinated by the excerpt of an essay on Chinese painting in the newspaper—“The Noble Features of the Forest and the Stream” (*Linquan Gaozhi*) by Guo Xi (383–84), precisely the same essay Binyon has paid tribute to in *Painting in the Far East*. Of this essay Fenollosa remarks in *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*, published in the following year, “with the exception of some relatively dry portions, it is one of the greatest essays of the world.”¹⁶ To this he adds, “It proves to us what an integral part landscape had come to play in Chinese culture and imagination; and it shows us just why the Zen [Chan] symbolism of nature gave such a splendid insight into characteristic forms” (11). It is in this essay that the Song artist “expressed once for all the guiding sentiment of Chinese landscape painting.” The aim of landscape painters, according to him, is to enable those who wish to “enjoy a life amidst the luxuries of nature” but “are debarred from indulging in such pleasures” to “behold the grandeur of nature without stepping out of their houses.”¹⁷ The passage seemed to be directly addressed to Stevens, who like the Song artist had always preferred a solitary life in nature and who had always wanted to be able to portray the atmosphere and spirit of nature in his own art.

More than four decades later, Stevens was to echo Guo Xi’s sentiment and outlook in “The Poem That Took the Place of a Mountain”:

It reminded him how he had needed
A place to go to in his own direction,

How he had recomposed the pines,
Shifted the rocks and picked his way among clouds,

For the outlook that would be right,
Where he would be complete in an unexplained completion:

The exact rock where his inexactnesses
Would discover, at last, the view toward which they had
edged,

Where he could lie and, gazing down at the sea,
Recognize his unique and solitary home. (*CP* 512)

Less than seven months before his death, upon receiving a large scroll from his protégé, the Korean poet Peter H. Lee, he was to remark of the delightful gift: “It represents my ideal of a happy life: to be able to grow old and fat and lie outdoors under the trees thinking about people and

things and things and people" (L 865).¹⁸ Note his emphasis on being "old," "outdoors," and "under the trees" when referring to his "ideal of a happy life." If this large scroll, now in the possession of his grandson, Peter Reed Hanchak, is evidence of his sustained interest in Far Eastern art, the clipping of the essay by Guo Xi enclosed in his 1911 letter to his wife is proof of his youthful fascination with the Song (or Chan) aesthetic, which he first tried his hand at in "Six Significant Landscapes" and then translated into his more influential "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" (1917) and "The Snow Man" (1921).

William Bevis in *Mind of Winter: Wallace Stevens, Meditation, and Literature* (1988) demonstrates in some detail how Stevens was attracted toward certain Chan-Buddhist notions best illustrated in Chinese and Japanese art. He perceptively points out, "One of Stevens' most distinguishing and pervasive characteristics, his detachment, is meditative and therefore experiential in origin, and difficult to perceive from within our culture" (7). Further, he notes, "If one distinguishes Western and Eastern artists along the lines of interest in cause-effect events, assertion, anxiety on the one hand, and consciousness, negation, serenity on the other, then Stevens would seem at least half oriental" (240). There is no need for me to refer to all the evidence Bevis cites to build up his argument. One incident toward the end of Stevens' Cambridge years, however, is worth repeating because of its close relevance to his poem under discussion.

In composing the poem Stevens probably had in mind two summer evening scenes in Reading, Pennsylvania. After a long walk on the afternoon of 17 July 1899, he went through garden "in a half enchantment over the flowers." Larkspur, "generally purple, or mixed purple and pink," bergamot, "a big husky flower," and mignonette, "a little, vigorous flower" caught his eye, and he was mesmerized by "The least breath of wind shimmer[ing] over them." "[T]he impression of them is daffodylic," he noted in his journal. "It is impossible to say more—they are so splendid" (SP 44). The next evening, as his journal entry of 19 July 1899 reveals, he "lay in a field on the other side of the creek to the S.E. of the house and watched the sunset. . . . The moon was very fine. . . . [He] felt a thrill at the mystery of the thing and perhaps a little touch of fear" (SP 46). The two summer evening scenes struck him as so beautiful that for days he tried to find words for what these had meant to him. A week later, he concluded, "Diaries are very futile. It is quite impossible for me to express any of the beauty I feel to half the degree I feel it; and yet it is a great pleasure to seize an impression and lock it up in words: you feel as if you had it safe forever" (SP 48).

This incident should no doubt help to illuminate two essential facts. First, Stevens developed in early youth an interest in "consciousness, negation, serenity," which Bevis has described as the "other aspect" in his nature. Second, he apparently had a strong desire to express this aspect "difficult to perceive from within our culture." In his search for forms,

Chinese landscape painting, particularly Song landscape painting, displayed in the major museums of Boston and New York, naturally had an appeal for him, as it appeared to be the best means of expression for clarifying the otherness in his character.

Stevens has evidently translated certain Song (or Chan) tastes, along with the “other aspect” in his nature, into section I of “Six Significant Landscapes.” The poem, despite its surface simplicity, exemplifies Song landscape painting in its most complex and articulate status. Its image might be seen as a labyrinth of Southern Song painters’—and Stevens’ own—reflections on the relations of art, artist, model, and observer. As the poem opens, the “old man” appears unequivocally as an object, a model, a part of a painting: he “sits / In the shadow of a pine tree / In China.” At this moment when he is classically posed, he is perfectly identified with other objects—the pine tree, larkspur, weeds, and water. Like everything else the figure is being gazed at, studied, and portrayed. This image, however, is capable of turning itself (or rather himself) into an active observer/seeing artist: “He sees larkspur, / Blue and white, / At the edge of the shadow, / Move in the wind.” Here he is no longer identified (at least not completely identified) with seen objects such as the pine tree and the larkspur. With the action of seeing and imagining his image as a model/seen object is subverted or deconstructed. His role has shifted from that of a passive model to that of an active observer/seeing artist. In other words, the viewer *in* the landscape has metamorphosed into the viewer *of* the landscape. At this moment we might as well question our own identity as the reader/observer/artist: Is it possible that the image has turned the table on us and changed us also into the gazer/object who at once gazes and is gazed at? This ambivalence intensifies in the final four lines where all the distinctions among art, artist, model, and observer disappear and everything in and beyond the poem (or the painting it depicts) becomes one moving along with the motion of the great “cosmic rhythm”:

His beard moves in the wind.
The pine tree moves in the wind.
Thus water flows
Over weeds.

This is the perfect experience of the Tao or “the Awakened,” the perfect condition of the Chan or “the Alone.” In the hanging scroll *A Luohan Contemplating a Lotus Pond*, one recalls, the Luohan, or Buddhist saint, pays no heed to the servant who has been standing there, tray in hand, for a long while. In the handscroll *A Sage Under a Pine Tree*, the old man is oblivious in relation to this world, so oblivious that he never notices a servant boy playing here and there around him. (In fact, in Ma Yuan and his most faithful imitators’ treatment of their timeless theme, the lone figure is also oblivious of being gazed at/portrayed. He sits characteristically with his face turned away from the artist/viewer.) Likewise Stevens in his poem

never mentions a little boy or a young servant that is always there in the background of the Southern Song landscape. Like the old man in the Chinese painting, he is oblivious of *this* world and he sees nothing but larkspur, blue and white, move in the wind. Thus water flows over weeds.

Section I of "Six Significant Landscapes" may not be a very important poem in Stevens' canon, but ironically it provides the fullest case for approaching Stevens' ways of crossing genre, age, and culture, his peculiar way of modernizing his poetry. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Stevens evidently was attracted to Song landscape painting, which at once stood for visual otherness, historical otherness, and cultural otherness. The influence comes down to his recognizing the Song artists' power of getting the unsayable message of the Tao or the Chan said. This power made it possible for Stevens to build a model of values dependent not so much on "cause-effect events, assertion, anxiety" as on "consciousness, negation, serenity." Out of this model some of Stevens' most memorable lines emerge:

The river is moving.
The blackbird must be flying. . . . (CP 94)

. . .

For the listener, who listens in the snow,
And, nothing himself, beholds
Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is. (CP 10)

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Notes

I wish to thank Patricia C. Willis, Curator of American Literature at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library of Yale University, for inviting me to speak on this topic at the Yale Conference on "Modernism and the Orient," October 18–19, 1996.

¹By the time of the Song, Chan had become the predominant Buddhist sect in China. Like Taoists, followers believed in "non-discrimination; universal *sunyata* or emptiness, the simultaneous transcendence and immanence of the absolute; and the ultimate inadequacy of language" (Yu 114).

²Ma Yuan (active 1190 to after 1225) and Xia Gui (active c. 1180 to 1224), often referred to as the Ma-Xia school, used ink washes to create effects of light and shadow. Their style influenced Chinese landscape painters of later generations.

³According to William Bevis, "*suchness* refers not to the *idea* of the thing itself, not to a theory of 'no ideas but in things,' but to the *experience* of perceiving the thing itself with meditative detachment, in a state of no mind. . . . [I]n meditative experience, voidness and thingness can be joined" (60).

⁴Many of these paintings were inspired by landscape poems of previous ages communicating similar themes. Ma Yuan's *A Scholar and His Servant on a Terrace* in the collection of Mr. and Mrs. A. Dean Perry, for example, is indicated as an attempt to illustrate the Tang poet Wang Wei's landscape poem, "Bamboo Lodge." (The seal at the lower left bears the Chinese characters for *bamboo lodge*.) Another famous painting

showing an old man gazing out into waters in the shadow of a pine tree, *Sitting by a Limpid Stream Composing Poems*, illustrates a scene from the Six Dynasty poet Tao Qian's ode on "Homecoming." The scroll, dated 1424, is now kept in China's Liaoning Provincial Museum. According to the Chinese art critic Wen Fong, this piece "shows the return of the Southern Sung [Song] style in both figure and landscape art" (135).

⁵This scroll appears a close copy of Ma Yuan's scroll *Scholar Viewing the Moon*, now housed in the Mokichi Okada Association Museum, Japan (see illustration JM 28-003 in Suzuki III: 349). The attribution to Huizong is questionable.

⁶According to Fenollosa, Xia Gui "quotes [these] as a poem especially liked by a painter." Fenollosa's widow, Mary Fenollosa, who edited *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*, explains in a footnote that the poem, like the painting, has an "inner meaning" Fenollosa often gave in his lectures: "The human figure sitting and gazing out into a distance that is blurred with mist typifies the sage—the thinker, the philosopher,—who does not blind himself to the social and political discords of his day, but can gaze on them calmly, knowing them to be, after all, just a little less ephemeral than mists or rising water. . . . This is a type of mind that has been for centuries an ideal one to both Chinese and Japanese thinkers" (II: 44).

⁷James Heffernan calls these "memory-pictures," that is, "a place at which—if not in which—the poet has stored idealized images of sea and sky" (98).

⁸I am indebted to Dr. Jan Fontein, former director of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, for confirming this in his response to my query.

⁹Fenollosa visited the Astor Library in New York in November 1903. His notes taken there are to be found in Fenollosa Notebook 5 ("Chinese Intercourse") now kept at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library of Yale University.

¹⁰Binyon gave a course of four lectures on "Art and Thought in East and West" in the small theater of the Albert Hall, Kensington, at 5:30 on Wednesday afternoons, March 10, 17, 24, and 31, 1909. The lectures were illustrated by slides of Chinese and Japanese paintings from the British Museum and elsewhere. Pound was given a ticket by Binyon. In a letter to his parents, Pound remarked that he found the lectures "intensely interesting" (15 March 1909). The letter is kept in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

¹¹In her letter to her family, 28 March 1909, Marianne Moore said that she had joined Dr. George Barton and his Oriental History class in a tour around the oriental section of the University of Pennsylvania Museum. In the letter she remarked, "Many of the class strayed away and yawned and whispered 'Oh! were you ever so bored.' I found everything however to occupy me." The letter is kept in the Rosenbach Museum and Library, Philadelphia.

¹²The eighth view, "Evening Snow," is left out in the first edition of *Painting in the Far East* (1908). In a second edition (1913), Binyon corrects the omission.

¹³For an account of Pound and Chinese and Japanese copies of "The Eight Views" in the British Museum, see my *Orientalism and Modernism*, 13 and 16. For a full discussion of "The Eight Views," see "Eight Views of the Hsiao and Hsiang Rivers by Wang Hung," in Wen C. Fong, et al., *Images of the Mind*, 213-35.

¹⁴A translation of Wang Anshi's poem can be found in H. A. Giles's *Gems of Chinese Literature*, Vol. 1 (1889, 1926):

A White Night

The incense-stick is burnt to ash,
the water-clock is stilled,
The midnight breeze blows sharply by
and all around is chilled.

Yet I am kept from slumber
by the beauty of the spring:
Sweet shapes of flowers across the blind
the quivering moonbeams fling! (392)

Stevens might have seen this version. His set of Giles's *Gems of Chinese Literature* in two volumes (the 1926 printing) is housed in the Huntington Library.

¹⁵ Guo Xi (born c. 1020) was an influential landscape painter and art theorist of the Northern (Early) Song period. The one great work by him that has come down to us is *Early Spring*, a hanging scroll of landscape painted in ink and light color on silk and dated 1072. It is now kept in the National Palace Museum, Taiwan. The Freer Gallery of Art owns a brilliant copy of Guo Xi's landscape, *An Autumn Day in the Yellow River Valley*. While Stevens could not possibly have seen any genuine work by Guo Xi, he may have viewed Tan Song's *Landscape in the Style of Guo Xi* in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In *Painting in the Far East* Binyon states, "Besides Kuo Hsi [Guo Xi], already mentioned, whose work seems almost unknown, Hsia Kuei [Xia Gui] and Ma Yuan, famous in Japan as Kakei and Bayen, are the pre-eminent landscape masters of Sung [Song]. All three belonged to the Northern school, and their work has the Northern vigour, combined with the wonderful delicacy and sensitiveness which marked the true Sung [Song] style" (136–37). Among Binyon's illustrations is a masterpiece by Ma Yuan, *Pines and Rocky Peaks*, said to be in the collection of Baron Yanosuke Iwasaki, Tokyo.

¹⁶ Fenollosa in *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art* provides extracts from a translation of this essay done in Japan by Japanese scholars (II: 12–19). See also John Hay's version of Guo Xi's essay in S. Bush and Shih Hsio-yen, eds., *Early Chinese Texts on Painting* (150–54).

¹⁷ The complete newspaper clipping, which Stevens enclosed in his 20 August 1911 letter to his wife, follows:

Nearly a thousand years ago the critic, Kuo Hsi, in his work, "The Noble Features of the Forest and the Stream," expressed once for all the guiding sentiment of Chinese landscape painting. He takes it as axiomatic that all gently disposed people would prefer to lead a solitary and contemplative life in communion with nature, but he sees, too, that the public weal does not permit such an indulgence.

This is not the time for us [he writes] to abandon the busy worldly life for one of seclusion in the mountains, as was honorably done by some ancient sages in their days. Though impatient to enjoy a life amidst the luxuries of nature, most people are debarred from indulging in such pleasures. To meet this want, artists have endeavored to represent landscapes so that people may be able to behold the grandeur of nature without stepping out of their houses. In this light painting affords pleasures of a nobler sort, by removing from one the impatient desire of actually observing nature.

Such a passage yields its full meaning only upon very careful reading. One should note the background of civilization, quietism, and rural idealism implied in so casual an expression as the "luxuries of nature." Nor should one fail to see that what is brought into the home of the restless worldling is not the mere likeness of nature, but the choice feeling of the sage. (Huntington: WAS 1926)

¹⁸ Stevens received two scroll paintings from Peter H. Lee. Of the first he remarked on 26 February 1952: "The scroll pleases me more than I can tell you. I have hung it in my own room. . . . I don't recognize the birds with their crests and strong feet" (L 741).

His comment about the second appears in the text. At the upper left of the first scroll there is a Chinese poem written out by one Tanyue Jushi on an autumn day in the year Xinji (18th in a sixty-year cycle):

From the Crystal Palace, unshut at night,
Issue sea fairies, reaching white waves;
For playing with the moon's reflection, my head lowered,
I am unaware that dew has soaked my clothes.

I am especially grateful to Mr. and Mrs. Peter Hanchak for providing me with slides of Stevens' Oriental paintings for research.

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**“Score this anecdote”:
Musical Instrumentation in
“The Comedian as the Letter C”**

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PERFORMING MUSICIANS OFTEN feel that an instrument bears the distinctive sound of its native land's language. For example, a French cello intones the nasal, an Italian violin sings full and robust “vowels,” an English viola chants the dark and noble, and a German double-bass growls the gutturals. Wallace Stevens was particularly sensitive to the notion of indigenous sound, feeling that American composers (and poets) should strive for it rather than draw upon inappropriate foreign tones, as he asserts in a letter:

When I hear a piece of music and want to identify it, my first attempt is to do so by trying to fix the nationality of the musician. American music is slow, thin and often a bit affected as if music found its source in something other than the ordinary human being. . . . We need a few American masters in both music and painting before we can have any real identity. (L 859)

In “The Comedian as the Letter C,” Stevens attends closely to the musical sounds that each particular “soil” might engender. Commenting upon the poem, Stevens writes that the reader must “hear all this whistling and mocking and stressing and, in a minor way, orchestrating, going on in the background” (L 352). Through orchestration, the poem charts Crispin's odyssey to the New World and maps his changing mental states by matching his physical and psychological movements with various types of musical instruments. In addition, its progressive development from simple monophony at the beginning of the poem to a suggestion of polyphony¹ near the end parallels historical developments in Western music.

Demonstrating that Stevens, through his friendships with music critics Pitts Sanborn and Carl Van Vechten, “moved in an environment in which Stravinsky's music, and talk about Stravinsky's music, was often in the air,” David M. Linebarger adroitly argues that “The Comedian as the Letter C” may well constitute Stevens' “version of how one might poetically ‘orchestrate’ Stravinsky[’s]” *Petrushka* (76). However, Stevens' poem is far

more various in its musical references than such a reading focusing only on Stravinsky allows. Analyzing the variety of Stevens' poetic language, Marie Borroff has called it a virtual "verbal peddler's pie" (58), incorporating the language of three different categories: (1) elevated or formal language, (2) foreign borrowings or archaic words, and (3) colloquialisms, slang, or words of native origin. This heterogeneity of language in "The Comedian as the Letter C" is matched by Stevens' simultaneous orchestration of the poem through allusions to an equally motley assortment of instruments, including some (e. g., lute, banjo) that do not appear in the score of Stravinsky's *Petrushka*.²

Stevens matches Borroff's language categories with musical equivalents. Thus, formal, elevated language corresponds to his use of "high-brow" standard instruments of the symphony orchestra: for example, trumpet, bassoon, or drums. Foreign borrowings or archaisms correspond to his use of such foreign, ancient, or obsolete instruments as the tambour (a French drum); the lute (mainly a Renaissance stringed instrument "of Oriental origin" [*Grove's* II: 784] with a pear-shaped back—thus, Crispin is called a "musician of pears" [CP 27]); and the psaltery (an ancient plucked stringed instrument similar to the zither, also from the Middle East). Colloquialisms, slang, or words of native origin correspond to Stevens' orchestrations for common, native, or primitive instruments: banjo, marimba, and tom-tom. Borroff analyzes Stevens' categories of language use, examining his "verbal music" on the level of specific lines, phrases, and words. This essay undertakes a similar analysis in order to uncover the significance of Stevens' specific orchestrations of idea through his choice of musical instruments. His use of an array of instruments with origins in disparate cultures seems a reflection of American diversity.

Following the score of instruments alluded to and then discarded, from the initial lute to the appearance of the banjo toward the end of the poem, allows the reader to replicate Stevens' own journey to arrive at the "basic slate, the universal hue" (CP 15) of the commonplace. "The long and the short of it," claims Stevens, "is simply that I deliberately took the sort of life that millions of people live, without embellishing it except by the embellishments in which I was interested at the moment: words and sounds" (L 294). In his orchestration of "The Comedian" he evidences interest in instruments both as "words" and as specific renderings of "sounds." In terms of instrument names as "words," it is reasonable to assume that Stevens had the same interest in the genealogy of instruments that he evidenced in the etymology of words. He was known to have sent employees at the Hartford to "look up certain words and their definitions, not only in the American dictionaries but the Oxford English and any others" and he was interested in "the tenth or twelfth meaning" of a word as well as the first (Brazeau 25, 40; Richardson I: 567–68). In terms of the "sounds," Stevens is particularly sensitive to the textures, timbres, and idiosyncrasies of various musical instruments. About the phrase "hoo-ing the slick

trombones" (CP 170) in "The Man with the Blue Guitar," Stevens noted that it "means making Bing Crosby" (L 783).³ His comparison of Crosby's idiosyncratic vocal practice of scooping from one note to another and a trombonist's occasional sliding from pitch to pitch shows his acute sensitivity to musical effect.

"The Comedian as the Letter C" suggests the loose structure of a symphonic tone poem composed in six movements: I. "The World without Imagination," II. "Concerning the Thunderstorms of Yucatan," III. "Approaching Carolina," IV. "The Idea of a Colony," V. "A Nice Shady Home," and VI. "And Daughters with Curls." It is a self-mocking *Bildungsgedicht* on the order of Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. However, lacking Hector Berlioz (who composed *Harold in Italy*, for solo viola and orchestra) to orchestrate "The Comedian," Stevens "orchestrates" it himself, with complex fecundity extending the romantics' use of "the metaphor of an instrument for the self" (Richardson I: 234).

In section I Crispin, an apprentice to music, poetry, and life, starts out as a "skinny sailor" whose changing states of development Stevens carefully orchestrates for a host of musical instruments. Crispin is depicted as "short-shanks." A "shank" refers to the shin or lower part of the leg, as well as the body or stem of printing type. Thus, the comedian Crispin, whose name and description both start with C, is a "character" inscribed in "the book of moonlight" both as protagonist and as letter. One might also interpret the C as suggesting C-major which, in a sense, "colonized" musical minds with a Westernized concept of tonality: "for a period of five hundred years, we have been ruled . . . by the common chord of C major" (Bauer 469). The word "eye," repeated four times in as many lines, emphasizes C as the "sea" upon which sailor Crispin travels and as his "see" of self-discovery. The reiterated "eye" casts us as his colleagues muttering the sailor's obedient response, "Aye-aye," while making us stutter over identity's "I." The printing trope recurs as Crispin journeys to find a "mythology of self, / Blotched out beyond unblotching" (CP 28). Both the recurrent printing trope and the idea of "short-shanks" Crispin (or Crispin "clipped") serve as musical leitmotifs throughout the poem.

While playing the outmoded "lute," sailor Crispin foppishly sports a hodgepodge of garments gleaned from his travels: "The lutanist of fleas, the knave, the thane, / The ribboned stick, the bellowing breeches, cloak / Of China, cap of Spain" (CP 28). The singsong quality of the "thane/ Spain" rhyme heightens the comic effect while Crispin's "bellowing breeches" shout the sounds of his inept music-poetry. Despite his extensive travels, Crispin's peering into the sea-glass (C-glass) boomerangs a limited image of what he is developmentally capable of seeing—himself, scored as the monophony of "one sound." Thus, the emotionally self-centered sailor is assigned only one voice of music and is humorously portrayed by a musical metaphor that emphasizes this defect through sexual innuendo: "Polyphony beyond his baton's thrust."

[Crispin] now beheld himself,
A skinny sailor peering in the sea-glass.
What word split up in clattering syllables
And storming under multitudinous tones
Was name for this short-shanks in all that brunt?
Crispin was washed away by magnitude.
The whole of life that still remained in him
Dwindled to one sound strumming in his ear,
Ubiquitous concussion, slap and sigh,
Polyphony beyond his baton's thrust. (CP 28)

The passage, as a whole, plays on "the sounds of the letter C" in all its various embodiments "both hard and soft" including such letters as K, X, and S (L 351, 294, 778). As Martha Strom points out, "the poem's sound effects represent a reversal of Crispin's psychological and poetic dwindling as they multiply the 'one sound' of the letter C into a plethora of variations on a single sound, creating a polyphonic effect" (22). This contrary movement underscores Crispin's limitation; he cannot cope with "polyphony." Perhaps Stevens is responding to Amy Lowell's article "Some Musical Analogies in Modern Poetry" in *The Musical Quarterly*, to which he subscribed. In that article, Lowell points to poetry's "one bad handicap, it cannot express simultaneity, and obviously, therefore, can show nothing to match the poly-harmony and free dissonant counterpoint of modern music" (154).⁴

While commenting on his use of C's chameleon qualities throughout the poem, Stevens warns his readers not to become so preoccupied with it that they ignore the poem's other features. Framing his concern in musical terms, he frets that "susceptible readers might . . . read the poem with ears like elephants' listening for the play of this sound as people at a concert listen for the sounds indicating Till Eulenspiegel in Strauss' music" (L 294). Just as the letter C can sound drastically altered as embodied within various words, a melody, too, can sound markedly different when played on various musical instruments with their idiosyncratic timbres. The Crispin "short-shanks" motif as changed by the musical colorations of different instruments might well be a way of demonstrating how each specific locale during the course of Crispin's journey informs his thinking.

Since Crispin is not yet capable of "polyphony," Stevens may be suggesting that he plays his lute in the Arabic style, plucking it with a quill plectrum. The lute, from the Arabic *al-údí*, "became known throughout the West in the time of the Crusades" (*Grove's* II: 784). Already "established in Spain by the tenth century," the instrument migrated north, evolved, and appeared in England by the thirteenth century (Remnant 32). However, it was not until "the last quarter of the fifteenth century" that lutanists⁵ began plucking "the strings with the thumb and fingers of the right hand" (Randel 460), an innovation that occurred around the time of the discov-

ery of the New World. Since this musical advance enabled lutanists to play two or more voices simultaneously (Baines 193, Randel 460), a “polyphony” that is “beyond” Crispin, it becomes clear that, at this developmental stage, he has not yet discovered the New World in terms of musical-poetic inspiration.⁶

Portrayed as “short-shanks,” Crispin is unable to make mental connections because he is missing that part of a tool or instrument that connects the handle with the working part, as in the shank of a scissors. One of his difficulties, then, is that he cannot use archaic mythology as a tool to help him find a personal “mythology of self.” As seen by Crispin, “the lost terrestrial,” the mythological god Triton is an ineffectual, decapitated God.

Triton incomplicate with that
Which made him Triton, nothing left of him,
Except in faint, memorial gesturings,
That were like arms and shoulders in the waves. . . .
(CP 28–29)

Moreover, to Crispin, the modern skeptic, the musical tritone (augmented fourth interval) is devoid of its import as the famous devil’s interval because he cannot connect it to a mythology or cosmic harmony. Other “multitudinous tones,” the voices of a rich polyphony, are “beyond” him. He hears only intermittent, vague strains of obsolete mythology, as an unconscious “sunken voice,” sounding like a “hallucinating horn.” Thus, “Dejected,” he is a “starker, barer self / In a starker, barer world,” reduced to a lowercase letter, the “merest minuscule in the gales” (CP 29).

Crispin begins to hear mocking sounds: “Against his pipping sounds a trumpet cried / Celestial sneering boisterously.” His anxiety over his insignificant place in the world ironizes humankind’s centuries-old cosmic doubt. Appropriately in this “anti-mythological poem” (L 778), Stevens scores this cosmic doubt for the trumpet, which “has a very long history, having been used in ancient Egypt, the Near East, and Greece” (Randel 880). The 1910 edition of *Grove’s Dictionary of Music and Musicians* would have provided Stevens with information about the ancestry of the trumpet, “an instrument which was already familiar when the Mosaic books were written; at Jericho performed one of the earliest miracles; figured in the Hebrew ritual; preluded to the battles around Troy; is carved on the stone chronicles of Nineveh and Egypt; and for which China claims, in the form of the ‘Golden Horn,’ a far greater antiquity than these” (V: 167). In a 1922 article titled “On the Divine Origin of Musical Instruments in Myths and Scriptures” in *The Musical Quarterly*, to which Stevens subscribed, he may have read about the biblical specifications for the trumpet’s design, part of “the heavensent orchestra” (Harris 73). Perhaps by scoring this “Celestial sneering” for the trumpet, an ancient instrument that survives in the twentieth-century symphony orchestra, Stevens signals the long lineage of humankind’s need for what the poet would later term a “su-

preme fiction." Incidentally, the tubing of the modern trumpet, as opposed to its ancient counterpart, is folded and shortened, suggesting the Crispin "clipped" leitmotif to underscore his concomitant feelings of spiritual diminishment.

At a low spiritual ebb, Crispin evolves from his previous state of self-absorption with his physical demeanor into "an introspective voyager" (CP 29). His change in insight ("Crispin beheld and Crispin was made new" [CP 30]) parallels an auditory change, for in addition to his own voice he now hears a drone, "a vocable thing, / But with a speech belched out of hoary darks / Noway resembling his" (CP 29). No longer the "insatiable egoist" unable to discern his own eventual demise in the midst of an ongoing world, he can now hear the voice of Nature, "the strict austerity / Of one vast, subjugating, final tone" (CP 30). Though "the singing of a melody against a single sustained note" cannot "be considered as 'harmonization' " (Eaglefield-Hull 214), this drone, as a primitive sort of harmony, scores Crispin's developmental move away from self-centeredness.

In the second "movement" of this "tone poem," "Concerning the Thunderstorms of Yucatan," Crispin is like the "Maya sonneteers" who ignore the poetic material in their midst (the many colorful exotic songbirds) and bow to European tradition by writing sonnets to the nightingale. Likewise, his thoughts are so colored by European influence that he cannot avail himself of the inspiration of his native environment: "to find / In any commonplace the sought-for aid" (CP 30). With a trumpet playing a mocking fanfare, Stevens underscores Crispin's rejection of local poetic inspiration and his submission to European forms.

Much trumpeted, made desperately clear, . . .
How greatly had he grown in his demesne,
This auditor of insects! He . . .
That wrote his couplet yearly to the spring. . . . (CP 30-31)

Crispin, the "auditor of insects," in section I is described with the neologism "nincompated," suggesting that he has the pate/head of a fool or simpleton. In section II, he is again described with belittling diminutive terms. His mental state is humorously orchestrated for "Sonorous nutshells rattling inwardly," percussive, natural objects. He is just beginning to hear a new kind of music, not a somnolent music "For sleepers halfway waking,"⁷ but a music/poetry "indigenous" to the Americas, "intrinsic verse" of native "soil" rather than that soiled by European influences. Crispin envisions this verse to be: "Of an aesthetic tough, diverse, untamed, / Incredible to prudes, the mint of dirt, / Green barbarism turning paradigm. . . ." This new music, like the "too juicily opulent" earth of the new continents, eventually proves too complex for the skills of poet-musician Crispin "to catechize" (CP 31-32). He begins to discern the strains of a new aesthetic that allows for dissonance, "A new reality in parrot-

squawks" (CP 32). Lowell, in her article "Some Musical Analogies in Modern Poetry" (1920), states:

It is curious how devoted both the modern poets and the modern composers are to the dissonance. Not that the use of dissonance is in the least new in music, rather is it that the proportion of dissonance to concord is greater. In poetry, however, the introduction of dissonance has created something like a revolution. (151)

As he tours a local cathedral, Crispin regresses, reverting to the pathetic fallacy by interpreting an approaching storm's rumble as punishment for his incipient rebellion against European poetic influences and his blasphemous poetry, antithetical to religious "prudes."⁸ His regression at the moment of potential enlightenment is underscored linguistically by such foreign borrowings as "façade," and "gasconade," constituting comic internal rhymes. Appropriately, the retribution exacted on him by traditional European religious and artistic influences is scored for the traditional "drums" of military music, "bassoons" of the "high-brow" symphony orchestra, and the archaic regal "clarion."

Inspecting the cabildo, the façade
Of the cathedral, making notes, he heard
A rumbling, west of Mexico, it seemed,
Approaching like a gasconade of drums.
The white cabildo darkened, the façade,
As sullen as the sky, was swallowed up
In swift, successive shadows, dolefully.
The rumbling broadened as it fell. The wind,
Tempestuous clarion, with heavy cry,
Came bluntly thundering, more terrible
Than the revenge of music on bassoons.
Gesticulating lightning, mystical,
Made pallid flutter. Crispin, here, took flight.
An annotator has his scruples, too.
He knelt in the cathedral with the rest. . . . (CP 32)

As an "annotator" or creator of musical-textual notes, Crispin wishes to incorporate the sounds of his physical universe. However, he is reduced to translating monumental forces into humorous orchestrations, comparing the thunder, for example, to "the revenge of music on bassoons." This phrase conjures up the bassoon passages in the comic symphonic poem, *L'Apprenti sorcier* (*The Sorcerer's Apprentice*), composed in 1897 by Paul Dukas, a piece with which Stevens would have been familiar.⁹ Stevens' apt phrase produces a symphonic counterpart to comedian Crispin. Described here as "valet," Crispin is just as inundated and terrified by the

deluge as the poor sorcerer's apprentice is by the bewitched, water-carrying brooms, represented by bassoons in the orchestral work. In this passage, the comparison of the storm's sound and force to the sounds of drums and bassoons provides an apt auditory equivalent for Crispin's turmoil and sense of defeat, particularly in light of Carl Van Vechten's comment in his article "On the Relative Difficulties of Depicting Heaven and Hell in Music" that "Hell . . . which suggests vice, ugliness, deceit, and defeat, is generally associated with snarling bassoons and rattling drums" (553).

Then, "envious" of the storm's force and power, Crispin hears in it an archaic strain of mythology, "the note / Of Vulcan," "The thing that makes him envious in phrase." Crispin's stages of mental development have taken him through self-absorption, evolving introspection, and now in section II, further attainment of the mental freedom to understand his inner self in terms of the "indigenous" forces that impinge upon and shape it. This recognition is an important step toward his later modification of "man is the intelligence of his soil" to its reversal, "his soil is man's intelligence." He gains self-possession even as he begins to understand that his "self" is possessed by and of its native land: "His mind was free / And more than free, elate, intent, profound / And studious of a self possessing him" (CP 33).

In contrast to the first section's unwavering drone of a "vast subjugating, final tone," Crispin becomes aware of shifting sounds, "the quavers" (in music, an eighth note or a trill) of the local torrential rains and thunder. Coloring the thought that poetry-music can be "the mint of dirt" of its locale, the following passage's purple mountains seem to reverberate with the "purple mountains' majesty" of "America the Beautiful":

Beyond him, westward, lay
The mountainous ridges, purple balustrades,
In which the thunder, lapsing in its clap,
Let down gigantic quavers of its voice,
For Crispin to vociferate again. (CP 33)

In fact, "an attempt was made in the 1920's" [to have "America the Beautiful"] declared the national anthem."¹⁰ In *The Musical Quarterly*, Amy Lowell contributes to this debate about the national anthem, stating:

nothing could be more regularly jiggling than our national anthem "Yankee Doodle" (and here let me say that I, for one, refuse to give up this completely native expression, this real folk-song of ours, for the hybrid "Star Spangled Banner." A friend of mine, a professor, one of those detestable beings who is always spoiling the happiest conceptions of the artist, has pointed out to me that "Yankee Doodle" is probably as English a tune as the "Star Spangled Banner." Well, after all, we too are, or were, English; but surely of a kind to which "Yankee Doodle" indu-

bitably belonged. We took it, we loved it, and I am forced to find it most unmistakably "us." (130)

Here as well as elsewhere in the poem, Stevens seems to concur with Lowell that the "Star Spangled Banner," an ungainly British tune¹¹ with an expansive vocal range¹² that reduces most ordinary citizens to comic singers at best, would be an inappropriate anthem for the American soil. In this passage, there is the suggestion that Stevens, wishing like Emerson to be free of the cultural bondage of the "tape-worm of Europe" (Emerson 1022), would prefer a serious national anthem extolling the beauties of a large and varied land. Significantly, both words and music to "America the Beautiful" were composed by Americans.¹³

Section III, "Approaching Carolina," begins:

The book of moonlight is not written yet
Nor half begun, but, when it is, leave room
For Crispin, fagot in the lunar fire. . . . (CP 33)

According to the 1910 *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, "fagotto" and "fagott" are "Italian and German names [for the bassoon which] come from its resemblance to a faggot or bundle of sticks" (I: 200). Here, with a foreign borrowing of the word "fagot" (twig), Crispin is reduced to mere kindling rather than solid inspirational fuel. The passage conjures up Crispin's earlier fear of the thunderstorm's sound, "more terrible / Than the revenge of music on bassoons." His imagined punishment by "lunar fire," merely reflected light from the sun, prevents him from writing poetry that is anything more than a pale reflection of European models. To describe Crispin as "fagot," a badge branding heretics, reminding them of their narrow escape from punishment (burning at the stake?), is to label him a failed iconoclast.

Thus, more fertile imaginative territory is always "beyond" Crispin: "America was always north to him." The appropriate material for this New England sailor is only half-defrosted, like the northern "spring" that comes "in clinking pannicles / Of half-dissolving frost" (CP 34). Once again, as in the "Sonorous nutshells" phrase, Stevens orchestrates Crispin's mental state ("pannicle" = "brain pan") using a percussive effect that resonates with section I's earlier "Ubiquitous concussion, slap and sigh" (CP 28). Prophetically, Crispin's attempts at verse/poetry are likened to the New England summer, "wet, not ripening, / Before the winter's vacancy returned." This passage continues with "palmettoes" that are "clipped frigidly" (as is Crispin at the end of the poem) by "crepuscular ice."

Crispin's "tempering ear," deaf to that which does not conform to the established musical order, shuts out the potential for richer poetic thoughts that exist above the quotidian drone of daily life as a "descant" line is one that sounds above an established melody, adding bright harmonic hues.

der to master the instrument's geography. Crispin the traveler determines that his own discovery is "worth crossing seas to find." Suddenly, he banishes a linguistic string of foreign, Latinate borrowings:

exit lex,
Rex and principium, exit the whole
Shebang. Exeunt omnes. Here was prose
More exquisite than any tumbling verse:
A still new continent in which to dwell. (CP 36–37)

The "still new continent" is native soil, still unexplored as the ground for Crispin's poetry. He realizes that he has been dominated by foreign influences, and that the goal of his voyage should be "to drive away / The shadow" of these "stale" forces and "To make a new intelligence prevail" (CP 37).

The extent to which one's soil colors one's thinking becomes clear to Crispin: "The natives of the rain are rainy men. . . / And in their music showering sounds intone" (CP 37). Even the music of these "rainy" natives reflects their surroundings. Crispin concludes that poetry, too, should reflect one's environment, "Sepulchral señors . . . / Should make the intricate Sierra scan" (CP 38) and "dark Brazilians" should sing "dits" (songs) of the pampas. A poet should be the "spokesman" of his specific locale.¹⁵ "The responsive man, / Planting his pristine cores in Florida, / Should prick thereof, not on the psaltery, / But on the banjo's categorical gut." Crispin begins to reject the foreign influences and instruments for those American, "Abhorring Turk as Esquimau, the lute / As the marimba" (CP 38). The 1910 edition of *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians* describes the marimba as "a curious instrument . . . in use in the southern parts of Mexico" (III: 57). This orchestration, then, partially recapitulates the aesthetic of the "Maya sonneteers" earlier in the poem.¹⁶ Significantly, the ancient stringed "psaltery" is replaced with the "banjo," which has come through the years to represent the quintessential American instrument.¹⁷ Thought to have derived from the African "banja," banjos were "made by slaves on the New World Plantations" (Baines 20). This orchestration resonates with "a banjo on my knee" from Stephen Foster's famous American folksong "Oh, Susanna," underscoring Crispin's move toward more fitting poetic inspiration. With the phrase "the banjo's categorical gut," Stevens puns upon the "catgut" material from which strings for musical instruments were reputedly made (*Grove's* I: 180).

The inappropriate and obsolete lute from the beginning of the poem seems to metamorphose into the banjo, both plucked or strummed stringed instruments used to accompany song. Perhaps this shift articulates the struggle to renovate poetry through an American aesthetic rooted in the homely, and the homespun—"to find / In any commonplace the sought-

for aid" (CP 30). The poem, too, in light of the rest of his *oeuvre*, seems Stevens' attempt to divest himself of pompous, effete, "borrowed" language.

Though there are onomatopoeic transcriptions for animal sounds (the dog's "bow-wow" or the cow's "moo"), standardized transcriptions do not exist for the sounds of musical instruments. Thus, Stevens is free to orchestrate the sounds of his instruments with verbal music bearing richly significant overtones. By using the reiterated word "tuck," he appropriately renders the banjo's sound while indicating what one must do to produce that sound, "plucking" or "pulling" its strings (OED). "Tuck" as an obsolete word signifying a trumpet blast undermines Crispin's new-found enlightenment with a bit of orchestrated "Celestial sneering." Its other meanings as a shortening pleat, a pointed sword, or even as a book flap used to keep it closed foreshadow Crispin's "clipped" poetic/musical career and underscore the Crispin "short-shanks" leitmotif.

Crispin, now described as an "aspiring clown," realizes that he cannot "be content with counterfeit, / With masquerade of thought, with hapless words" (CP 39). He finds himself trapped by the influences and pre-established language that mask thought. The "cock declaim[s . . .] / Trinket pasticcio," proclaiming his poetry to be little more than a valueless hodge-podge, imitative of the styles and forms of others. Crispin, here described in dual fashion either as the fraudulent deceiver, "tiptoe cozener," or the precise servant of literature, prefers "text to gloss," "veracious page on page, exact" (CP 39–40). "Gloss" (*glosa*), interpreted as embellishment or ornamentation in music, would underscore Crispin's lack of originality, his inability to improvise.

In section V, "A Nice Shady Home," Crispin abandons his plans to "colonize his polar planterdom" and settles instead in the South. He marries a "prismy [showy] blonde" and, "Like Candide," is "content" to be pampered by and to "carouse" with his wife, his life becoming narrower, more "confined" (CP 40–42). Though he had originally aspired to be "preceptor to the sea," he is now merely the settler of a cabin, "magister of a single room." Crispin's advancing age and lapsing ambition, summed up in his "trod[ding]" gait, contrast with the liveliness of the morning, orchestrated with the musical term "presto." His life is "Composed of evenings like cracked shutters flung / Upon the rumpling bottomness."

In the presto of the morning, Crispin trod,
Each day, still curious, but in a round
Less prickly and much more condign than that
He once thought necessary. (CP 42)

The word "round," in addition to being a circuit, suggests a type of polyphonic piece in which voices enter in canon harmonizing with one another (e.g., "Three Blind Mice"). The simplicity of a round is often used as

one method of introducing children to harmonization. The round here is perhaps a hint at some small measure of development on Crispin's part.

Unwilling to plumb further the depths of his psyche and to sound the complex voices of "indigenous" harmonies, Crispin "stop[s] short before a plum" of a poem.

Whoever hunts a matinal continent
May, after all, stop short before a plum
And be content and still be realist. (CP 40)

Thus, for him, "The words of things entangle and confuse. /The plum survives its poems" (CP 41).

The world remains for Crispin's descendants to describe. Reaching the false "bottomness" of the depths he is willing to sound, he is left to question whether he should have "bray[ed]" his acquiescence

in profoundest brass
Arointing his dreams with fugal requiems?
Was he to company vastest things defunct
With a blubber of tom-toms harrowing the sky?
Scrawl a tragedian's testament? Prolong
His active force in an inactive dirge,
Which, let the tall musicians call and call,
Should merely call him dead? Pronounce amen
Through choirs infolded to the outmost clouds?
Because he built a cabin who once planned
Loquacious columns by the ructive sea? (CP 41)

Reflecting his inability to hear the complex polyphony of "fugal requiems," Crispin's dirge is orchestrated for the strange combination of regal "brass" and primitive "tom-toms." This humorous orchestration combining incongruous instruments in an acoustically envisioned "dirge" is not part of the original "Journal of Crispin." The dirge contained in the later version of the poem allows for a self-mocking distancing to underscore the notion that "Crispin represents an atrophying part of the poet, the voice of the outgrown aspect of Stevens," the part that "Stevens rid himself of . . . by writing about it" (Strom 23, 31). The "comic effect" of this "tragedian's testament" is enhanced by the iterative word "tom-tom" (Borroff 44, 51) and by the odd sound produced by these instruments, a noisy "blubber" bearing overtones of whale fat, thus underscoring the demise of his ambition in overblown, hyperbolic tones. Crispin's "clipped" career is orchestrated both by Stevens' reference to the contrastingly "tall musicians" and by the "short-shanks" leitmotif, which sounds here as the "choirs *infolded* to the outmost clouds" (emphasis added).

The "march" of time is scored for "crickets" who "beat their tambours" [little drums] around Crispin's cabin. The borrowed French instrument,

"tambour," punctuates his retreat into the "quotidian" with a breakdown pun by dividing into "tam," conjuring up "tame" + "bour," conjuring up "bore." The timbre of his life is now of the "quotidian composed," a daily existence that "saps [would-be] philosophers" (CP 42). Unable to sustain self-analysis for long, he rationalizes: "Can one man think one thing and think it long? / Can one man be one thing and be it long?" (CP 41). This questioning with its reiterated word "long" underscores his "short-shanks" leitmotif through contrast.

Imprinting the passage of time, the sun as "fortuner" tempers Crispin's life as though he were an instrument. The hunched posture of an old man is the negligible "return" on the fortune of his life's investment doled out by the niggardly treasury of life to which there is no key or clue.

the quotidian

Like this, saps like the sun, true fortuner.

For all it takes it gives a humped return

Exchequering from piebald fiscs unkeyed. (CP 43)

Crispin is "unkeyed" to or out of tune with his native world. Debate among Stevens' contemporaries over the suitability of "The Star Spangled Banner" as a national anthem suggests that Stevens may be punning on Francis Scott Key, hinting that the song that later became our national anthem is really "unkeyed" to the rich harmonies of the United States. Indeed, the *Report on "The Star-Spangled Banner," "Hail Columbia," "America," "Yankee Doodle"* published by the Library of Congress in 1909, reflects this debate.

Opinions differ widely on the merits of "The Star-Spangled Banner" as a national song. Some critics fail to see in Francis Scott Key's inspired lines poetry of more than patriotic value. Some look upon it merely as a flag song, a military song, but not as a national hymn. Some criticize the melody for its excessive range, but others see no defects in "The Star-Spangled Banner" and feel not less enthusiastic over its esthetic merits as a national song than over its sincere patriotic sentiment. (7)¹⁸

The word "exchequering" in Stevens' poem suggests the "exchequer" ("échiquier," "eschaquier," "eschiquier" or "chekker") that appears under the rubric "undetermined musical instruments" in A. J. Hipkins' *A Description and History of the Pianoforte and of the Older Keyboard Stringed Instruments* published in 1896. It is conjectured to have been a "stringed instrument furnished with a keyboard" (Hipkins 53) "already known in England in 1360" (Remnant 79). Ripin documents "thirty-one references" to the instrument "in various writings of the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries" (23 n1). However, scholars have argued over what precisely an exchequer was. One scholar claims it was a clavichord, while another suggests that "the name was not restricted to any one kind of instrument."¹⁹ Music

scholar Mary Remnant summarizes her own inconclusive findings by stating, "Unfortunately no solution has yet been forthcoming from the visual arts of the fourteenth century" (80). Considered, then, as an orchestration of the motley American identity, the "exchequer" appropriately illustrates why Crispin is unable to extract a self "beyond all unblotching" from this "piebald" (blotched/spotted) instrument.

Having settled down to "things within his actual eye" (CP 40), in section VI, entitled "And Daughters with Curls," Crispin effects a "return to social nature" as he fathers four daughters "nibbling at the sugared void." If musical "polyphony" was once "beyond his baton's thrust," his progeny now provide the missing voices in "cantilene," suggesting a kind of multi-voiced song. The "chromatics" that they "spread . . . in hilarious dark" are both color chromatics of varying skin tones ("puerile tints / Of spiced and weathery rouges": "blushed," "flaxen," "blasphemously pink," and "pearly,") and perhaps musical chromatics since the girls seem very close in age. The second child is an infant "not yet awake" to anything but "the motherly footstep." The third is also a pre-toddler, "a creeper" still crawling "under jaunty leaves," and the fourth child is "pent now" in some kind of playpen (CP 43-45).

With directions to "Score this anecdote," the poem's last section contains instructions for orchestrating or interpreting Crispin's tale. As "Disguised pronunciamento," the conclusions drawn from his life are ambiguous. Either his life, though "muted, mused, and perfectly revolved," is filled with the harmony provided by his daughters' "sounds of music coming to accord / Upon his lap," or he has taken nothing from his life's investment and is a "profitless [prophetless] / Philosopher . . . / Concluding fadedly" and out of tune ("Prone to distemper") with his soil (emphasis added). If he has embellished the tale or "relation" of his life, "Illuminating" it like a fanciful golden letter in a medieval manuscript, the "distort[ion]" avails naught:

what can all this matter since
The relation comes, benignly, to its end?

So may the relation of each man be clipped. (CP 46)

At the poem's outset, Crispin was portrayed as having "a barber's eye." At its conclusion, the poor comical barber is "clipped." As comedian, he is likened to his ancient counterpart, the *komodos* [Greek, "barber"] who carried tales from one part of the country to another. His questing spirit is "clipped," reminding us of shorn Samson's loss of vital strength or the suggestion, made by Linebarger, that this moment in the poem corresponds to the one when "Petrushka's head is severed by the blackamoor's scimitar at the end of *Petrushka*" (85). Moreover, as poet, Crispin fears that if his works are too "quotidian," they will be read like a newspaper, clipped and tossed away. In his final days, the "relation" of his "voice" to other

pitches of a chord is “clipped,” reduced to a musical “unison,” “a tone identical in pitch with another” (*Webster’s*). Crispin dies just as he begins to discover polyphony through the procreation of “four voices.” With alliteration intoning a bell sound and the “thrum” of some unnamed stringed instrument, which oddly resonates with the later “Man with the Blue Guitar,” we are instructed to: “Forgather and bell boldly Crispin’s last / Deduction. Thrum with a proud douceur / His grand pronunciamiento” (*CP* 43).

Crispin’s “tone poem,” though it effects a closure through its cadence on “music as it comes to unison,” leaves a significant “Thrum[ming]” in our ears. As the final orchestration of sound in “The Comedian,” “Thrum” is far from being a purely onomatopoeic rendering of the sound made by plucking or strumming a stringed instrument. The word, instead, carefully underscores Crispin’s textual [Latin, *texere*, “to weave”] legacy. However foreshortened, “tucked,” or “clipped” his life may be, Crispin’s daughters as “four blithe instruments” remain, nevertheless, to weave or stitch together a wonderful “rhapsody.”²⁰ Metaphorically, they are indeed “thrum,” the “warp threads left on the loom after the cloth [of Crispin’s life text] has been removed” (*Webster’s*).

Four daughters in a world too intricate
In the beginning, four blithe instruments
Of differing struts, four voices several
In couch, four more personae, intimate
As buffo, yet divers, four mirrors blue . . .
Hinting incredible hues. . . . (*CP* 45)

The poem, moving from the idea of musical monophony at its beginning to a hint of possible polyphony at its conclusion, suggests both its own interpretive trajectory and charts a future for American poetry. In his later years, Stevens recognized the difficulty of writing a poem about the “changing image of this country” (*L* 869). In “The Comedian as the Letter C” perhaps he is proposing that something akin to polyphony would be a way of rendering the rich weave of the American identity. Perhaps, too, the “unheard music” implied by this metaphor of the movement from monophony to polyphony suggests a way of tracing the complexity of multi-stranded thought itself. Stevens seems to hint at a method for hearing the mind’s geography in much the same manner that a good listener attends to the multiple strands of melody in a polyphonic work, recognizing them as independent yet concordant components of a single composition. In the final analysis, the poem ironizes comedian Crispin’s univocal propositions (“man is the intelligence of his soil” or “his soil is man’s intelligence”), underscoring the way in which his mind has been colonized by binary thinking in much the same way Western music had been dominated by the hegemony of C major. Crispin errs in feeling that he must “think one thing and think it long” or “be one thing and be it long.” Why

not hover for awhile between “the beauty of inflections” and “the beauty of innuendoes” (CP 93)? A new sort of polyvocal poem that entertains simultaneity of thoughts to “resist the intelligence / Almost successfully” (CP 350) might just well “make a new intelligence prevail” (CP 37). In any event, the poem presages the creative possibilities for Crispin’s progeny whose potential for polyphony points to a new paradigm for poetry and for thinking itself.

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Notes

¹Martha Strom uses the term “polyphony” in two ways: (1) as an actual linguistic term to describe the “multipl[ication of] the ‘one sound’ of the letter C into a plethora of variations on a single sound, creating a polyphonic effect” and (2) as a borrowing from music to describe Stevens’ narrative technique within the poem, which she terms “narrative polyphony” whereby “two voices together tell Crispin’s story and never fully merge” (22–23). Though here I am referring to the word in its musical sense, this embedding of allusions to polyphony throughout the poem could be construed as a playful interpretive hint clueing the reader in to the “polyphonic narrative method” that Strom elucidates.

²Nonetheless, as Linebarger has established, the poem does reveal Stevens’ rapport with music critics and familiarity with musical concerns. Also, John Hollander’s essay “The Sound of the Music of Music and Sound” has been instrumental in my reading of the poem.

³Stevens later retracted this reading (L 789–90).

⁴David Linebarger suggests that Amy Lowell’s piece was “an article Stevens most likely read with some care” (76).

⁵I have chosen to follow Stevens’ (*Webster’s*) spelling here for “lutanists,” although Remnant and Randel spell the word “lutenists.”

⁶We cannot be sure that Stevens would have had at his command such detailed knowledge of the history of music. However, both his deep personal love of music and the intensely musical aspects of this particular poem support such a reading. The meaning of “lute” as a kind of soil, a “tenacious clay . . . composed of various ingredients and used to stop an orifice” (*OED*), further emphasizes Crispin’s difficulties in fashioning for himself an “authentic and fluent speech.”

⁷Possibly alluding to Johann Sebastian Bach’s “Wachet Auf” [“Sleepers Awake”], BWV 645.

⁸Perhaps like the one in Stevens’ “A High-Toned Old Christian Woman” (CP 59).

⁹Included in Michael O. Stegman’s discography of Stevens’ record collection. Since this particular recording was issued after “The Comedian” was published, I assume that Stevens was familiar with the work and was prompted to buy it when it was later released on the Toscanini/New York Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra Recording (Vic. 7021).

¹⁰It was not until March 1931 that President Hoover signed a bill specifying “The Star Spangled Banner” as the national anthem of the United States.

¹¹According to Paul Nettl, “It is . . . an established fact that the very first report on the song [“the first public mention of the song” appeared in the *Baltimore American* of September 21, 1814] does identify the tune to be used with it. It was the tune of ‘To Anacreon in Heaven,’ a song imported from England. . . .” John Stafford Smith (1750–

1836), "a British musician, conductor, and organist," composed the "tune to this song with the simple title, 'Anacreontic Society,' " meaning it for use of this London "social-musical-masonic club" (203–04). "It was officially adopted as the National Anthem of the United States by an act of Congress in 1931" (208).

¹²The range of "America the Beautiful" is a ninth, whereas that of the "Star Spangled Banner" is a twelfth.

¹³The poem was written in 1885 by Katharine Lee Bates, born in Massachusetts, after she was inspired by the vista from the "summit of Pike's Peak in Colorado" (Fuld 96). The melody comes from "Materna," composed in 1882 by Samuel A. Ward, who was born in New Jersey.

¹⁴An interesting point of fact: most of the world's great orchestras reside in cities in colder climates removed from the equator.

¹⁵In writing "The Comedian as the Letter C," Stevens as a reader of *The Musical Quarterly* may have been pondering a statement made by Daniel Gregory Mason that "No folk music . . . no individual composer, no school of composers, can 'express' America. The age of such simplicities is past, if it ever existed" (332). Mason questions the assumption "that interpretive truth is assured by geographical propinquity," mocking the idea that "the chant of the Indian 'expresses' the modern American because the habitat of both is west of the Atlantic Ocean" (323). He argues that the time has come for "the musician who speaks, not a dialect but a language understood over the civilized world" and that one who does so has not necessarily " 'lost contact', as the phrase goes, 'with the soil' " (323). He argues that for "a folk music . . . to enter vitally into art it must bring with it something more than quaintness or distinctive idioms, it must be genuinely expressive of the temperament of the people using it; and of the complex 'American' temper" (324). Finally, quoting Goethe, he advocates a "universal literature" (332).

¹⁶Edward Marx suggests that "Stevens' interest in the Mayans . . . [reflects] the movement of American literary 'nativism' (thus locating the Mayan as a potential literary ancestor), and . . . identifies a possible connection with contemporary Mexican poets whose work might have been known to Stevens" (181).

¹⁷Philip F. Gura discusses the banjo's move from consideration as an African-American instrument to the notion that "for two centuries now the banjo has epitomized an American instrument" (271).

¹⁸See Frank Kidson, who discusses this report in *The Musical Quarterly* (1917).

¹⁹The theories of Edwin Ripin and Christopher Page as discussed by Remnant (80).

²⁰Crispin's third daughter is described as a "pearly poetess, peaked for rhapsody" (CP 44). The Greek *rhapsōdos* was one who stitched songs together. In music, a rhapsody is a free form instrumental composition.

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“The warmth I had forgotten”: Stevens’ Revision of “First Warmth” and the Dramatization of the Interpersonal

JOHN DOLAN

LATE IN LIFE, Wallace Stevens wrote a short poem called “First Warmth,” which he then radically altered by using parts of it in a new, longer poem, “As You Leave the Room.”¹ The revision is dramatic in every sense of the word, for it reverses the entire argument of “First Warmth.” The successive versions constitute an antinomy, a purposeful juxtaposition of conflicting or contradictory positions. If we recall that Stevens believed the body of his work constituted a single great poetic narrative, one he wished to call “The Whole of Harmonium” (L 834), we can see how these antinomian versions offer a particularly clear illustration of the technique whereby Stevens dramatizes, via sharply shifting arguments between and within his poems, his simultaneous longing for and suspicion of “warmth”—the quotidian interpersonal dimension that many critics claim is missing in his work.

The accusation of lack of humanity (or “warmth”) has been made against Stevens’ work many times, by his contemporaries—as when Robert Frost referred to Stevens as a “bric-a-brac” poet—and by more recent critics. The clearest exposition of this attitude toward Stevens’ work is Mark Halliday’s *Stevens and the Interpersonal*. Halliday bluntly charges that Stevens slights “the interpersonal”:

I do think that some lovers of Stevens have made overblown, infatuated claims for him, failing to register seriously his neglect of a vast [interpersonal] dimension of our lives. (Halliday 8)

I suggest that taking Stevens’ dramatized rejections of this “vast dimension” for simple statements of the poet’s position is a serious interpretive mistake, analogous to reducing Dostoevsky to nihilism or Pascal to atheism. By slighting Stevens’ conflicting gestures toward and away from the interpersonal, as exemplified by the antinomy Stevens constructs in the two versions of “First Warmth,” critics such as Halliday ignore Stevens’ reliance on *aporia*—implying by denying—as a means of indicating indirect longing.²

The most ancient and familiar dramatization of this sort of disingenuous longing in Western culture is in the loud, repeated denials of desire by Aesop's fox as it stares up at the unreachable grapes; so it is not surprising to find Stevens giving the reader a hint at how his work should be read by comparing his own embittered desire with the fox's rejection of the "sour grapes." The comparison occurs in the first stanza of "On the Road Home":

It was when I said,
"There is no such thing as the truth,"
That the grapes seemed fatter.
The fox ran out of his hole. (*CP* 203)

The reader of Aesop's tale is meant to read through the fox's denial to see the frustrated longing it conceals; Stevens expects his readers to read through his denials of the importance of "warmth" in the same way, so that these denials become one stance in a lifelong play of stances. As Marie Borroff observes,

The poetry of Wallace Stevens is, from beginning to end, a theater of changing adversarial relationships: images, symbols, and themes contend, in endless succession, on an endlessly shifting stage, and all resolutions are subject to change without notice. . . . [P]oetry, as Stevens conceived of it, is not the portentous expression of eternal verities. (87)

The play of adversarial elements Borroff describes extends even to the personae that the poet creates—the characters who "speak" the succession of stances within and between poems. The poem "Credences of Summer," to which Stevens alludes in line six of "As You Leave the Room," ends with Stevens' clearest manifesto on his use of these personae:

The personae of summer play the characters
Of an inhuman author. . . .
[T]he characters speak because they want
To speak, the fat, the roseate characters,
Free, for a moment, from malice and sudden cry,
Complete in a completed scene, speaking
Their parts in a youthful happiness. (*CP* 377–78)

The two versions of "First Warmth" show Stevens in the act of creating two such stances by means of two such opposed, disposable personae, and making these two crash against each other in a sort of ritual combat between the desire for and rejection of the warmth that critics such as Halliday accuse him of simply slighting. Version 1, "First Warmth," is a brief, quiet poem:

I wonder, have I lived a skeleton's life,
As a questioner about reality,

A countryman of all the bones in the world?
Now, here, the warmth I had forgotten becomes

Part of the major reality, part of
An appreciation of a reality;

And thus an elevation, as if I lived
With something I could touch, touch every way. (OP 117)

Stevens created "As You Leave the Room" by bracketing "First Warmth" with a new beginning and ending, and by changing a few key words of the original. The eight lines of "As You Leave the Room" that are borrowed from version 1 are italicized below (the first four words of the poem are italicized in the original). Words within those eight lines that have been changed are underscored:

*You speak. You say: Today's character is not
A skeleton out of its cabinet. Nor am I.*

*That poem about the pineapple, the one
About the mind as never satisfied,*

*The one about the credible hero, the one
About summer, are not what skeletons think about.*

*I wonder, have I lived a skeleton's life,
As a disbeliever in reality,*

*A countryman of all the bones in the world?
Now, here, the snow I had forgotten becomes*

*Part of a major reality, part of
An appreciation of a reality*

*And thus an elevation, as if I left
With something I could touch, touch every way.*

*And yet nothing has been changed except what is
Unreal, as if nothing had been changed at all. (OP 117–18)*

The change from version 1 ("First Warmth") to version 2 ("As You Leave the Room") is striking. "First Warmth" records a loss of faith—the faith one finds, particularly in some of Stevens' early poems such as "The Snow Man," in the certainties of winter, white, and snow. The poem argues that "warmth" is what has been forgotten in embracing this faith. "First Warmth" records a moment of doubt in which the poet admits that he

may have slighted “the warmth”—presumably the “warmth” of the interpersonal as well as of the seasons, spring and summer, which are usually ranked below winter or posed as antitheses to winter, the season of truth, in poems of the “The Snow Man” tendency. “As You Leave the Room” reverses the argument of “First Warmth,” asserting that it is “snow,” not “warmth,” that has been forgotten, and thus that the poet is no kin to “skeletons”—human forms notably lacking in “warmth.”

Both attitudes have long genealogies in Stevens’ work; they represent two opposing factions whose internal argument forms much of the narrative of “The Whole of Harmonium.” Neither stance can eliminate the other; but at various points in his lifelong dramatization of his struggle, Stevens allows one or the other position the advantage. Particularly in his early poems, Stevens seems to privilege an attitude of simple scorn for what is interpersonal—the same stance that he produces in “As You Leave the Room.” In early poems such as “Another Weeping Woman,” Stevens insists in as provocative a manner as possible that “The magnificent cause of being, / The imagination” (CP 25) must be defended against, to borrow a phrase from Nietzsche, “human, all too human” pathos. Stevens’ famous comment on Frost’s poetry, “His work is full (or said to be full) of humanity” (L 825), couches in irony his youthful conviction that the “humanity” of poets is destructive and disingenuous.

But Stevens shadows this confident nihilist persona with another. This other persona, the ancestor of that which speaks in “First Warmth,” implies that the proud disdain of “The Snow Man” is only the fox’s affected disdain for the unattainable grapes. Neither stance can be called Stevens’ “real” attitude; they are voices in the dramatization of a lifelong evolution of thought. In this sense, Stevens’ personae speak with equal legitimacy in both aspects of the antinomy. What is most impressive about his deployment of the two stances in the antinomy represented by “First Warmth” and “As You Leave the Room” is its revelation of the economy with which Stevens can alter a poetic structure to produce these opposing stances.

Stevens’ first move in turning “First Warmth” into its opposite involves embedding the whole of “First Warmth” in a new framework. Thus the first line of “First Warmth,” in which the poet begins to “wonder” about being a skeleton, is delayed in “As You Leave the Room” to the seventh line, with the six preceding lines refuting it in advance. By his use of the ambiguous pronoun “you”—which is completely absent from “First Warmth”—Stevens manages to make the reader defend the poet against his own anxiety. It is “you” who assert that the poet is not a “skeleton”: “You speak. You say. . . .”

The first six lines of “As You Leave the Room” form a sort of bracket around the embedded eight lines of “First Warmth”—but the bracket needs closure. Thus Stevens adds an entirely new couplet to the end of the poem:

And yet nothing has been changed except what is
Unreal, as if nothing had been changed at all.

"First Warmth" ended with an unusually affirmative declaration: "something I could touch, touch every way." The final couplet added in "As You Leave the Room" retroactively places the affirmation of "First Warmth" in the category of dream or wishful thinking. In fact, we learn only that what is "Unreal" has been affirmed; as the final phrase insists, in effect "nothing [has] been changed at all." By using the subjunctive mood ("*as if* nothing *had been changed* at all"), Stevens ends the poem with a negation, the direct opposite of the affirmation with which "First Warmth" ended.

The changes from "First Warmth" to "As You Leave the Room" have the effect of bringing the poem back to what Halliday would consider Stevens' orthodox position. "As You Leave the Room" follows a common Stevens strategy: the first six lines state a position that is then brought into question by the middle part of the poem—in this case, the embedded eight lines borrowed from "First Warmth"—that is confuted in turn by the ending of the poem, apparently restoring the status quo stated in the first lines. In "As You Leave the Room," the new first lines defend the "I" even before it is attacked, refuting the notion that "I" wrote what "I" wrote out of cowardice. The middle portion of the poem, beginning with line seven, "I wonder . . ." seems to shift the "I" back toward self-doubt. But the defense of the "I" suddenly comes back at the very end of the poem. Stevens reasserts the firm defense of the "I" as having pursued worthwhile, courageous action, and refutes the position of the middle part of the poem—the part that constituted "First Warmth."³

All the detailed changes in the poem fit clearly into this pattern. Most basic of these techniques is the addition of "you" to the poem.⁴ The speaker dramatized as "You" will take much of the pressure off the "I" in this revision. In the first six lines of version 2, it is "You" who speak; and "You" offer testimony in advance that the question raised by "First Warmth" can be safely dismissed. The characterization of "I" as a "skeleton," which occurred in the first line of "First Warmth," is now denied in advance by the first couplet of "As You Leave the Room":

You speak. You say: Today's character is not
A skeleton out of its cabinet. Nor am I.

Both the evanescent persona of the poem ("Today's character") and the underlying "I" that created it are included in this absolution. The second and third couplets of "As You Leave the Room" continue to testify in defense of the "I"—this time by offering counter-examples: particular poems by Stevens that could not possibly have been written by a "skeleton":

That poem about the pineapple, the one
About the mind as never satisfied,

The one about the credible hero, the one
About summer, are not what skeletons think about.⁵

After adding these six lines of defense, Stevens is ready to include the eight lines of "First Warmth" in his new poem. But one important change is made in the first couplet of the old poem; Stevens now says:

I wonder, have I lived a skeleton's life,
As a *disbeliever* in reality. . . .

The couplet is identical to the first couplet of "First Warmth," except for one thing: whereas "First Warmth" characterized the "I" as "*a questioner about reality*," "As You Leave the Room" makes "I" "*a disbeliever in reality*" (emphasis added). This is the first of the three important changes Stevens makes to the lines of "First Warmth" that he includes in "As You Leave the Room." These changes pull the poem away from quotidian life toward the world of the Snow Man. In fact, the second substitution literally turns "warmth" into "snow"; "First Warmth" referred to "the *warmth* I had forgotten," but when Stevens incorporates this line into "As You Leave the Room," "warmth" becomes "snow": "The *snow* I had forgotten. . . ."

It is unusual for Stevens to invoke "snow" as that which is hidden or denied. More commonly, he portrays "warmth" and its patron seasons of spring and summer as dangerous—but also desirable—illusions, illusions that one aspect of the poet cannot forgo. Even when Stevens is denying the legitimacy of this warmth, he acknowledges its persistent appeal. In a famous self-accusation, he acknowledges the power of the tepid seasons, fall and spring:

You like it under the trees in autumn,
Because everything is half dead. . . .

In the same way, you were happy in spring,
With the half colors of quarter-things. . . . (CP 288)

Though it seems to end sardonically, this stanza begins with the acknowledgment that one does, in spite of oneself, like this mild, transitional world. "First Warmth"—early spring—is a dangerous time not only for Stevens but for many modernist poets working in the revaluation of the seasons: "April is the cruellest month" for Eliot as well. Though all seasons undergo his poetic appraisal, it is most often winter that Stevens' early poetry chooses to praise, along with its particular color, white, and its proper temperature, cold. The best-known manifesto of this poetics is, of course, "The Snow Man":

One must have a mind of winter . . .

And have been cold a long time
To behold the junipers shagged with ice,
The spruces rough in the distant glitter

Of the January sun. . . . (CP 9–10)

In fact, Richard Wilbur recalls Stevens' commenting in a letter that "most art is created out of a condition of winter" (Brazeau 170). Some poems contemporaneous with "First Warmth" reveal the same reverence for the things of winter:

a world in which, like snow,
He became an inhabitant, obedient
To gallant notions on the part of cold. (CP 523)

But some do not. In fact, many of the later poems adopt an ironic tone toward the worship of winter, the stance expressed in "The Snow Man." The consciousness of "cold" is now a set of "gallant notions"—a significant diminution of the "mind of winter." "Cold," as Stevens seems to have recognized near the end of his career, would not suffice. Harold Bloom comments on the implications of this seasonal/epistemological preference in Stevens' later poetry, when Stevens evidently began to doubt the simple winter/good, summer/bad opposition:

Stevens . . . [encounters] the irony that he has been all too successful in [teaching himself] to reduce all perception to . . . "the solid of white, the accomplishment / Of an extremist in an exercise." The exercise is abstracting to . . . the Snow Man's Pyrrhic victory; the extremist is Stevens himself . . . ; the "accomplishment" is the intolerable congealing . . . into a universal blank of whiteness, as horrifying . . . as it is in Melville's meditation upon the whiteness of his whale. (Bloom 258)

The last of the three substitutions in the second version is perhaps the most remarkable of all; it incorporates the exact sounds of the original while reversing the meaning. The penultimate line of "First Warmth" is "And thus an elevation, as if I *lived*"; this is changed in "As You Leave the Room" to "And thus an elevation, as if I *left*"—"lived" to "left," a near-homonym, in which the echoes are opposite in meaning. In "First Warmth," the poet admits having "lived" in the quotidian world; in "As You Leave the Room" he has "left" this world.

The revision of "First Warmth" into "As You Leave the Room" occurs within a very specific context: Stevens' dramatization of a lifelong internal argument. The revision occurs contemporaneously with several other late Stevens poems in which the "warmth" of daily life is dramatized in the act of asserting its importance as if it did so against the poet's will. "As if"—the subjunctive mode is very important here. "First Warmth" may be dramatically opposed by its successor, "As You Leave the Room," but the poet created this opposition, and gave the versions equal care.

In fact, "First Warmth" is the voice of a persona who has been fighting in Stevens' internal argument throughout his career. The dramatic persona who speaks "First Warmth" is the antagonist called up by the dra-

matized excesses of the certitude of "The Snow Man." It is the voice that speaks in "The Man on the Dump"—that literally deposits the Snow Man, in that poem, on an urban garbage heap. It is also the voice of the interpersonal, of "warmth" and of "journalism"—all the "vast dimension" that Halliday accuses Stevens of ignoring. "First Warmth" begins with the poet's accusing himself of having "forgotten" a legitimate element of "reality." In raising this question, Stevens devotes considerable effort to insisting on the particular, the specific, the outward-looking, present-tense mode: "*Now, here, the warmth I had forgotten becomes / Part of the major reality*" (italics added). The association of immediacy and particularity with this "warmth" with what is, in a very negative sense, "human," is clear in many Stevens poems from his last years:

The proud and the strong
Have departed.

Those that are left are the unaccomplished,
The finally human,
Natives of a dwindled sphere. (CP 504)

In these late poems Stevens often uses place names that put the poem clearly in the quotidian, "journalistic" world. Stevens uses Connecticut place names in early poems as well, but usually in uneasy juxtaposition with a more intense, interior landscape, as in the title, "Of Hartford in a Purple Light," or in high and archaic diction, as in his apostrophe to the "thin men of Haddam" (CP 93) in "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black-bird." What is distinctive about the use of local place names in the late poems is that they name banal places in banal diction, revealing the poet as an American householder. The difference is the difference between the earlier title, "Of Hartford in a Purple Light," and the later title, "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven." Stevens' late embrace of the quotidian extends even to placing his personae in an automobile moving between two very plainly named towns in suburban Connecticut:

Last Friday, in the big light of last Friday night,
We drove home from Cornwall to Hartford, late.
(OP 135)

Stevens, who has been "ephebe," "poet," and musician, invents in these late poems a new, "gloom[y]" epithet for himself: he is now a mere "journalist":

A light snow, like frost, has fallen during the night.
Gloomily, the journalist confronts

Transparent man in a translated world. . . . (OP 136)

The title of this poem, "On the Way to the Bus," suggests his habit of dramatizing, in his late poems, the victory of the mundane, quotidian life.

Stevens depicts this victory as a slow process, often resisted, a forced acknowledgment of what he would have preferred to ignore. In "The Plain Sense of Things," he dramatizes the misery of this submission of his imagined world to the outer, actual one:

After the leaves have fallen, we return
To a plain sense of things. It is as if
We had come to an end of the imagination,
Inanimate in an inert savoir.

It is difficult even to choose the adjective
For this blank cold, this sadness without cause.
The great structure has become a minor house. (CP 502)

In these late poems, Stevens records the insignificant facts of suburban life with a vengeance: "The chimney is fifty years old and slants to one side." "The great structure has become a minor house"—and the house has its relentlessly banal problems: a chimney that needs repair and a "greenhouse [that] never so badly needed paint" (CP 502).

But when Stevens' gaze turns to the actual world, he confronts another quotidian problem: the problem of "warmth." In another poem written at roughly the same time as "First Warmth," Stevens returns to his characterization of spring and dawn—those "half" times mentioned in "The Motive for Metaphor"—as frighteningly ambiguous, mixed realities:

There is this bubbling before the sun,
This howling at one's ear, too far
For daylight and too near for sleep. (OP 125)

This moment at which spring and day begin simultaneously—that is, a warm spring morning—is presented in these late Stevens poems as a doubtful, ambiguous time:

At the earliest ending of winter,
In March, a scrawny cry from outside
Seemed like a sound in his mind.

He knew that he heard it,
A bird's cry, at daylight or before,
In the early March wind. (CP 534)

This cry "from outside"—from the phenomenal world, which invades the house vacated by the imagination—is what Stevens hears in his late poems. And it is, in most of these poems, a cry that comes with the "first warmth"—the beginning of day, and the beginning of spring: "this bubbling before the sun," "At the earliest ending of winter, / In March. . . ."

The voice that speaks for “the warmth I had forgotten” is not a new appearance in the late poems. It first comes to power in the seminal poem “The Man on the Dump.” In that poem, whose protagonist is the colloquial/impersonal “You,” the “You” makes a pilgrimage to a city dump, seeking an epiphany of a new, rigorous, modernist sort—an epiphany revealing

the janitor’s poems

Of every day, the wrapper on the can of pears,
The cat in the paper-bag, the corset, the box
From Esthonia: the tiger chest, for tea. (CP 201)

“The Man on the Dump” ends savagely, with the collapse of this junkyard epiphany. The argument of this collapse is that it is a form of cowardice that led “you” to seek transcendence on the dump. The fear of involvement in a more alluring, more beautiful world leads “you” to make the absurd pilgrimage to the dump. As a marker of the sudden turn against the pilgrim, “you” becomes “one”:

One sits and beats an old tin can, lard pail.
One beats and beats for that which one believes.
That’s what one wants to get near. Could it after all
Be merely oneself, as superior as the ear
To a crow’s voice? Did the nightingale torture the ear,
Pack the heart and scratch the mind? And does the ear
Solace itself in peevish birds? Is it peace,
Is it a philosopher’s honeymoon, one finds
On the dump? Is it to sit among mattresses of the dead,
Bottles, pots, shoes and grass and murmur *apest eve*:
Is it to hear the blatter of grackles and say
Invisible priest; is it to eject, to pull
The day to pieces and cry *stanza my stone*?
Where was it one first heard of the truth? The the.
(CP 202–03)

The self-accusation of this stanza is the same one Stevens directed at himself decades later in “First Warmth”: that one flees from what is most dear, toward “a philosopher’s honeymoon” in “peevish” (or “wintry”) scenes and sounds. If the nightingale tortures the ear, then one flees to cacophony. One flees from nightingale to crow as one flees from “warmth” to “snow.” “The Snow Man” and “The Man on the Dump” are the same man, but the man on the dump has been cast down by his creator, literally thrown on the dump—dumped. The reason given for this dumping is the same one Stevens revives in late poems such as “First Warmth”: that embracing “snow” and “cold” is simply a form of cowardice. This is not *the* position, but *a* position within a fractal struggle that goes on within and between poems, volumes, decades, in “The Whole of Harmonium.”

This old fear returns to Stevens with particular power at the end of his life. In the retreat from the radical self-accusation of "First Warmth" to the defensive poetics of "As You Leave the Room," Stevens presents, respectively, the terror and the faith that were the elements of his outwardly stolid life. Neither version need be regarded as preferred; both are true, as Stevens insisted again and again, at different times of day, different times of year: "We think, then, as the sun shines or does not. / We think as wind skitters on a pond. . . ." (CP 518). "First Warmth" is the voice of a dangerous moment, when

the earliest single light in the evening sky, in spring,
Creates a fresh universe out of nothingness by adding itself,
The way a look or a touch reveals its unexpected magnitudes.
(CP 517)

Against this final affirmation comes the retreat back to the snow. From "warmth" to "snow"; "questioner about" to "disbeliever in"; "lived" to "left," Stevens draws back from the seduction of spring. His last poems assert that "Today the mind is not part of the weather" (OP 139). But that conviction holds only as long "as the sun shines or does not." In fact, the poem in which Stevens most movingly expresses his determination to wish away the personal, the "warmth [he] had forgotten"—"A Clear Day and No Memories"—ends by summoning up that dimension even while denying it:

No soldiers in the scenery,
No thoughts of people now dead,
As they were fifty years ago:
Young and living in a live air,
Young and walking in the sunshine,
Bending in blue dresses to touch something—
Today the mind is not part of the weather.

Today the air is clear of everything.
It has no knowledge except of nothingness
And it flows over us without meanings,
As if none of us had ever been here before
And are not now: in this shallow spectacle,
This invisible activity, this sense. (OP 138–39)

As so often in Stevens' work, the denials serve only to summon up "the rejected things, the things denied" (CP 247) more intensely. What is denied in "A Clear Day and No Memories" is "the warmth" that Stevens confessed, and then erased, in the transition from "First Warmth" to "As You Leave the Room." This is a warmth of mind and weather: the warmth of affection and of the sun ("walking in the sunshine"). The entire first stanza of "A Clear Day and No Memories" summons up—by denying—this occluded world, iterating and thus making real what it tries to deny.

The second stanza then flees it—the description of the things denied occurs only in the first stanza—in terms that echo the effort of “The Snow Man” “not to think”; or, when that proves impossible, to think only of the double negation that is a charm against the phenomenal world: “Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is” (CP 10); “no knowledge except of nothingness.”

In these poems written “at so much more / Than seventy” (CP 522) the poet’s effort to think away all “humanity” is often depicted as a process motivated by fear—the fear of loving that which is mortal, that which is sinking into death. The concluding lines of part I of “The Rock” are a dramatization of desperate, terrified rejection of “the interpersonal,” here depicted as a romantic assignation:

The words spoken
Were not and are not. It is not to be believed.
The meeting at noon at the edge of the field seems like

An invention, an embrace between one desperate clod
And another in a fantastic consciousness,
In a queer assertion of humanity. . . . (CP 525)

The terror in this denial is clear. It is “desperate” in its hopeless addiction to “humanity,” even as that mortal, personal life is sinking into death. The very intensity of the denials implies the intensity of the desires they deny. This is the essentially rhetorical, dramatic aspect of Stevens’ work, the dimension that Halliday and other critics miss.

It is particularly ironic that, in return for having created this most subtle and rigorous dramatization of longing and fear, Stevens should be criticized for his alleged insensitivity to “the interpersonal.” Critics such as Halliday, devoted to a simple “humanity” in poetry, and failing to keep in mind that Stevens is above all a dramatic poet, have missed Stevens’ dramatization of the simultaneous fear of, and longing for, “warmth,” “journalism,” and the mundane world of other people. Reading simple denial into complex aporia, Halliday reduces a self-conscious, highly dramatized, lifelong internal argument to one unchanging dogma. Poems such as “First Warmth” and “As You Leave the Room” are two distinct, opposing moments, two arias in the Wagnerian tragedy that is “The Whole of Harmonium.” These two late poems dramatize the simultaneous longing and fear the poet feels when considering the quotidian affectional world. In the small but vital changes he made, turning “warmth” into “snow,” “questioner” into “disbeliever,” and “lived” into “left,” Stevens himself has made, refuted, and finally held in antinomian stasis a painfully frank and sophisticated dialectic on his own conception of “the interpersonal.”

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Notes

¹On the dating of "First Warmth" and "As You Leave the Room," Holly Stevens writes that "First Warmth" "appears to be an early version of ["As You Leave the Room"], which Samuel French Morse dates '1947–1955?'. Neither poem was published during Stevens' lifetime" (*Palm Preface*).

²Arthur Quinn defines the trope of aporia as "Talking about not being able to talk about" (101) the subject of the text, while Richard Lanham offers this definition: "True or feigned doubt about an issue" (252).

³The second couplet of "As You Leave the Room" alludes to "The Well Dressed Man with a Beard," another aporiac denial of truth and "warmth," which concludes, "It can never be satisfied, the mind, never" (*CP* 247).

⁴"You" is of course a tricky word in Stevens' poetry. Often he uses it as a colloquial, impersonal pronoun, interchangeably with or in place of the more formal impersonal pronoun "one." But where Stevens uses both a "you" and an "I," as he does in "As You Leave the Room," there is usually a dramatized argument or struggle between two distinct positions, if not necessarily two different people.

⁵These lines allude to particular Stevens poems. "That poem about the pineapple" refers to "Someone Puts a Pineapple Together" (*NA* 83), and, as noted above, "The one about summer" refers to "Credences of Summer," which is contemporaneous with "Someone Puts a Pineapple Together." "The one about the credible hero . . ." could refer to any of several Stevens poems from the WW II period—from the modest "Paisant Chronicle" (*CP* 334) to the massive "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" (*CP* 380). But the most likely candidate is "Examination of the Hero in a Time of War" (*CP* 273).

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Wallace Stevens, Octavio Paz, and the Poetry of Social Engagement

DEAN RADER

*La poesía,
puente colgante entre historia y verdad*
[Poetry,
suspension bridge between history and truth]
—Octavio Paz

*Poetry as manifestation of the relationship that man
creates between himself & reality*
—Wallace Stevens

AT FIRST GLANCE, it would appear that the Mexican Nobel Laureate and former ambassador Octavio Paz would have little in common with the Connecticut poet-lawyer Wallace Stevens. Paz, who has lived on three different continents and held various governmental positions, seems miles away, both geographically and culturally, from the more reserved Stevens. However, the two figures share a number of correspondences, the most obvious of which lies in their poetic influences. Both Stevens and Paz embrace facets of romanticism through the paradigm of music and creativity, and both are fascinated by the bewildering and intoxicating powers of the imagination and its relation to the poetic act. Similarly, the poets share certain symbolist assumptions, particularly the belief that the poet must find a way to give voice to the ineffable and evanescent. It is not surprising then that Paz and Stevens share more compelling thematic concerns as well. Each is interested in what poetry can and should do, and, at different points in their lives, each pondered if and how poetry should respond to social movements and political events.

Most readers of modern poetry would consider Paz a more overtly political poet than Stevens, but I would suggest that Stevens' poetry is as socially aware as that of Paz. Perhaps because Paz has a reputation as a third-world poet and man of letters and because he has held various governmental positions, we enter a Pazian text inclined to read his work as a political or social statement. However, despite the impact of important books by Alan Filreis and James Longenbach, the same cannot be said for how we read Stevens.

The problem stems from the fact that the definition of a socially aware poetics has been confined for too long by the shackles of denotation and allusion. Rarely will one find in either Paz's or Stevens' work overt references to or commentary on specific social issues or political scenarios. Cleverly, and subtly, Stevens and Paz resist turning the site of poetry into a site of political platforming; however, the poets do write a poetry that can and does speak to the desires of a larger audience. In an attempt to discover how Stevens and Paz enact a social poetics, we are forced to confront the chiasmas of reality and poetry and a virtual maze of questions: Does writing a poetry that concerns itself with questions of reality have any connection with actuality? Or, to use Alan Filreis' term, does Stevens' version of reality correspond with considerations of the "actual world"? If so, how does Paz, with his version of reality, affect how we read Stevens? To answer these questions, we must first pose larger questions, ones that explore what it means for Paz or Stevens or any modernist poet to create a poetics that is socially aware. For Paz and Stevens poetry is a way to access the world, a means by which the poet enters into the discourse of society. By writing a poem, any poem, Paz and Stevens enact a socially aware poetics because, for each, poetry represents a fundamental act of social engagement. Through their innovative use of the lyric, both Stevens and Paz build on their shared poetic experiences and create a poetry that addresses the evanescence and impermanence of the human experience.

Reading Stevens alongside Paz foregrounds questions of artistic and social responsibility in an intriguing way because both poets complicate traditional notions of the political and the formal. For instance, writing a poem about World War II would certainly be seen as a political act. But can a poem that was written about the imagination be a political act? Can it be a social act? Must one directly address societal dilemmas in one's poem in order to write a political poem or a poem of political awareness? Stevens and Paz would say no. To read Stevens as a poet in tune with and responding to the world requires us to look at the poetic act not as a synopsis of political or social events but as a means of *engaging* the political or social. For Stevens and Paz, it is through this engagement that the poetic act enables the poet to insert himself into the world and into the discourse of that world.

Stevens' complex qualifications and speculations and especially his formal blank verse and traditional constructions seem to belie such a reading. Throughout the twentieth century, scholars have associated a politically aware poetics with the formally radical or transgressive. When William Carlos Williams begins to scatter words across the page, his poetics seem to acquire an aura of social conscience, and similar observations can be made of Charles Olson, Gary Snyder, and Ezra Pound. On the other hand, Stevens, Hart Crane, Theodore Roethke, Marianne Moore, and others frequently come under fire for appearing to pay more attention to form than to societal problems or current events.¹ In other words, Stevens' po-

etics becomes problematic for some critics because he seems more interested in revolutionizing language than in revolutionizing social or class structures. However, if one reads both Stevens and Paz closely, one finds that these poets use language as an *entrée*, as a means of groping toward a politics or toward a societal vision, and ultimately, toward an articulation of responsibility and relation. Thus, the tropes of form and function—like the poetics of Stevens and Paz—conflate in a number of provocative ways and eventually unfold as fundamentally interrelated modes of private and public dialogue.

When we read Paz, we know that we are entering a particular history—a history of surrealism, the Maya, the Aztecs, Hindu religion, Mexico City, semiotics, Tenochtitlán. In short, we accept that Paz's modernist constructions are attempts to come to terms with a specific history and social economy. Critics such as Filreis and Longenbach succeed in arguing that Stevens, like Paz, is politically and socially aware of the events of his time; however, as both Filreis and Longenbach demonstrate, writing a socially or politically responsible poetry involves more than incorporating the news into poems. For Stevens, the poetic process is a profound link between the self and society. A revealing method of exploring this often-ignored perspective on Stevens is through Paz, primarily because Paz, like Stevens, attempts to confront socially provocative questions through equally provocative tropes of absence, desire, creation, and connection. There is little evidence that Paz consistently writes a more political or socially aware poetry than Stevens, yet, because of his past and because of his poetic and personal associations, he is perceived as a poet who directly speaks to and for his people in a way Stevens does not. I would submit that this perception and the perception that a poet such as Williams or Pound engenders a more socially conscious discourse than Stevens derives from a misplaced privileging of form and fact. In other words, purely external elements such as how a poem looks on the page or whom a person associates with or what magazine a person subscribes to preclude more speculative and provocative modes of social inquiry enacted by poets such as Paz and Stevens. By reading Stevens alongside Paz, we can see how Stevens' proclivity for subtle engagement finds augmentation and articulation in Paz.

How Stevens and Paz arrive at or work through their various poetic explorations is illuminating. Though Paz is somewhat younger than Stevens (he was born in 1914 and Stevens in 1879), the stages of their poetic careers parallel each other. Paz has achieved a wider global recognition than Stevens, but in the 1940s and 1950s both poets would write what was, up to that moment, their most important and most critically acclaimed work. Most critics consider Paz a closet romantic, not unlike Stevens, hiding behind the mask of the surrealists and vanguardists. Indeed, critical terminology used to explicate Paz's work sounds as though it is derived from the Stevens critical lexicon: imagination/reality, dualism/holism, creation/reduction, nature/abstraction. In her pioneering study of Spanish-

American Literature, Jean Franco, the best reader of Latin American poetry in the United States, claims that Paz seeks “a general language which subsumes in its broad concepts the variety and flux of the world. Of the three important Spanish-American poets of this age [Neruda, Vallejo, and Paz], Paz is the most abstract” (296). If we were to delete the word “Spanish” from the previous sentence and imagine the three poets in question as T. S. Eliot, William Carlos Williams, and Wallace Stevens, there is little doubt whom critics would label the most abstract. Although such terminology is potentially useful, Paz and Stevens perpetually resist obdurate classifications, and it remains difficult to pin the label of abstraction on either Stevens or Paz when both poets invest so much in the immediacy and vitality of words. Paz writes in 1958, “Árbol por solitario / hombre por la palabra / Verdad y error / una sola verdad / una sola palabra mortal” [“A tree for its hermit / a man for his word / Truth and error / a single truth / a single mortal word”] (56–57).² Paz’s linkage of life and language finds resonance in Stevens’ pithy aphorism, “words of the world are the life of the world” (CP 474), and both speak to the mortality and imminence of communication and writing. Ultimately, Stevens and Paz suggest that the space of poetry, even a space of abstraction, is not one of seclusion but of interaction.

Still, the term “abstraction” indicates a certain solitude; the very etymology of “abstract” (*ab*, which means “off” or “away,” and *tractus*, from the Latin *trahere*, “to draw or pull,” i. e., “to draw away from”) suggests a literal *withdrawal*, and, like Stevens, Paz is familiar, even comfortable with solitude. His now-famous study of the psychology of the Mexican character, *El laberinto de la soledad* [*The Labyrinth of Solitude*], first published in 1950, deftly, though not without controversy, illustrates how the Mexican is immersed in a culture and mindset of utter isolation. Ironically, Stevens often seems mired in a mindset of isolation—unlike Paz, he never traveled abroad, and, as Beverly Coyle and Alan Filreis intimate, Stevens sometimes exhibited an aversion to meeting acquaintances in person (4).³ Indeed, in many of his letters, he refers to himself as sequestered, or locked up *in* the state of Connecticut or *in* his routine (Filreis xvii). However, both poets see poetry as an act that necessarily breaks the fetters of solitude. Most frequently, critics claim that if Stevens and Paz ever irrupt notions of solitude, it is because they transcend it. “Transcend” (from *transcendere*) connotes a rising, an overarching ability to step over and “rise above.” I would contend that a different Latin cognate, *rumpere*, better characterizes how Stevens and Paz inject their poetry into the world. The connotations of *rumpere* (from which “rupture” derives) are numerous. It can mean to violate, to annul, and to interrupt, and a more intriguing and appropriate reading of these poets demands that we consider their poetry as ruptures, as rifts in traditional notions of solitude. Neither poet approaches poetry as a singular voice but as a mode of communication and communion—a dialogue with the self, the other, and the world. As Stevens writes, “Po-

etry is the statement of a relation between a man and the world" (*OP* 197), a statement that ruptures silence and isolation.⁴

If, as both Stevens and Paz claim, poetry is the statement of a relation between a person and the world, then what of those critics who claim that Stevens and Paz use poetry as a means of escape from the world? Critics such as Marjorie Perloff and Hugh Kenner contend that Stevens is most comfortable floating leisurely down the river of imagination, oblivious to the struggles and failures of those who have more pressing concerns than whether Major Man finds order among a landscape of disorder. Coincidentally, as Paz has matured and his poetry has become less historical and more theoretical, he has suffered similar criticisms of political conservatism and bourgeois aestheticism. The notion that Stevens and Paz flee from the world is touched on by Michael Wood in one of only two articles on Paz and Stevens in English.⁵ Wood subscribes to Perloff's and Kenner's view of Stevens by arguing that Stevens and Paz share a desire to create a "space of readership . . . not only for a certain kind of poetry, but for poetry as distinct from other human activities" (Wood 326). Where Paz and Stevens differ, argues Wood, is in how the poets respond to the various forces that function as impetuses to write poems, or why the poets feel the need to create this space between themselves and "reality." Wood posits that for Stevens "reality is oppressive because of its *weight*" (327) and for Paz because it is "faceless" (329). Though I find Wood's thesis problematic, he raises an interesting question. Do the poets feel the need to create a "space" between the self and the immanent pressures of the world? My response is no. Rather than creating a space *from* the world, which is designed to protect oneself from the world, both Stevens and Paz desire to create a space *in* the world, and that space is poetry.

In a letter explaining his motive behind "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," the poem in which Stevens best reconciles the dual desires of speaking poetically and speaking to society, he admits "we have to live in the world as it is—that is to say: face it, not back away from it" (*L* 582). Similarly, Paz contests the desire to remain in an isolated, Edenic existence, apart from the flux of the world: "Estamos condenados / a dejar el Jardín: / delante de nosotros / está el mundo" ["We are condemned / to leave the Garden behind: / before us / is the world"] (634–35). The space the poets create is not a space of transcendence but a site of imminence; a space that is not so much separate from external forces but as one that reintroduces us to the politics and possibilities of the present. Such a space enables the poet to reside in the world and to enter into the language of that world as part of a dialogue instead of as monologue.⁶ That Paz and Stevens need a haven to which they can escape from reality insinuates a certain fear in these poets, as though they are afraid their poetry cannot fit into the current conception of what society needs or desires. Although I am less convinced that the poets fly headlong into the teeth of the world, as Franco and a few recent Stevens critics have suggested, I do think both

poets approach the world more or less from the perspective of inclusion and affirmation. This is to say that although Paz and Stevens may not always say “yes” to the world, they indubitably do not say “no.” More accurately, their statement is “potentially.”

Jason Wilson observes that “Paz’s great theme is the redemption of the divided alienated individual through love or union with the Other, a completion of the isolated individual in a passionate couple that offers hope of a collective salvation” (*Octavio Paz* 4). To me, Paz’s project of unification and salvation resonates with the ambition and vision of Stevens’ “supreme fiction,” and like Stevens, Paz remains aware that such a project is fraught with the immediacy and incessance of desire. The desire for love, agency, communion, poetic fulfillment, and perhaps most of all, an utterance in a universal language perpetually redefines the poetic project, for the poet and society *must* communicate on more than poetic terms. As Paz writes at the beginning of his treatise on poetry: “The poem is not a literary form but the meeting place between poetry and man. A poem is a verbal organism that contains, stimulates, or emits poetry. The form and the substance are the same” (*Bow and Lyre* 5).⁷ The urge to connect violates the boundaries of form and content, author and reader, just as in “The House Was Quiet and the World Was Calm” when “The reader became the book; and summer night / Was like the conscious being of the book” (*CP* 358). Although some may read this poem as a fearful retreat into the protective pages of the book, a more attuned consideration attends Stevens’ subtle questions on the ambiguity of borders and the possibilities of textual participation. By rupturing traditional notions of relation, Stevens and Paz ignite an almost radical mosaic of poetic contingency as they maneuver in the margins of the always-evanescent site, the ever-shifting meeting place of poetry.

But are Paz’s and Stevens’ poems political? Are they historical? Do they succeed in connecting personal desires for efficacy with public desires for a literature that speaks to an audience other than those familiar with Hindu and Mayan gods or those who chuckle spontaneously at a caricature like Professor Eucalyptus? Filreis rightly notes that Stevens feels a strong dual desire to “make his poetic career a ‘general moving forward’ ” and to “experience and write about ‘longed-for lands’ . . . while remaining at home in the United States” (xv). Throughout his book, Filreis goes on to illustrate that these competing desires are “characteristic American attempts at discerning the motion of an individualized poetic self within wartime and postwar place and time” (xv). In other words, Stevens’ aspirations both to move forward and to stay put are endemic American modes of cultural inscriptions during certain periods in our history. Depending on what was going on both with him and in the world, Stevens would alternately ignore and acknowledge historical and political events of his time. Just as we are not always certain what sort of politics are being commented on in Paul Celan’s or Anna Akhmatova’s poetry, so are we occasionally in

the dark in regard to Stevens'. Thus, I would question whether Stevens seeks to create a space because he fears the world is too "heavy"; rather, like Celan, Akhmatova, and also like Pablo Neruda, he writes because the enormity of the world intrigues him. In fact, for Stevens and perhaps even more so for Paz, the world is too portentous *not* to write poetry.

Stevens and Paz share certain political concerns such as the Spanish Civil War and historical violence, and occasionally these events appear in the poems. For instance, in poems such as Stevens' "The Men That Are Falling" and "Esthétique du Mal" and Paz's series of poems "Interruptions from the West," in which he examines Mexican history and the 1968 Olympics massacre, neither poet shies away from taking a stand. Focusing on these poems makes us feel secure that we can literally ground Stevens' and Paz's poetry in a tangible historical coding, that they are fundamentally chained to the behemoth of history, and that the text we are in search of is essentially always present in the past. But what makes a comparison of Stevens and Paz fruitful is an understanding that both poets want more out of poetry than a bulletin board for items from the news. They need poetry to serve as a bridge from the internal to the external, from the self to the world. They need poetry to connect them not only to history but also to their readers and to the language they share.

Unfortunately, these aspects of Paz's and Stevens' work frequently go unexamined by critics. What remains troubling about Wood's comments and those by Perloff and others is that they assume an undeviating Stevens; that is, they take for granted the assumption that Stevens never changes his mind, and they tend to ignore that Stevens develops and alters his vision over time as America and modernity change. This is a serious misreading of Stevens, one Filreis and Longenbach have gone to great lengths to disprove. Indeed, in *Wallace Stevens: The Plain Sense of Things*, one of Longenbach's goals is

to answer those readers who see Stevens's aesthetic as one of retreat or mere aestheticism. There are moments when Stevens was such a poet (particularly in the late 1940s and early 1950s—my second Stevens), but the times when he was not were as much the result of the contradictions of his sensibility as of the complexities of the world in which he lived: Stevens's major achievements coincide with the major historical events of his lifetime—the Great Depression and the two world wars. (279)

That Stevens is not consistent in how he views history and society is a given, say Longenbach and Filreis; thus, to propose that his need to create poetry means a perpetual need to create a sanctuary in the world in order to escape from it is to ignore the often subtle shifts in what is certainly one of the most complex poets (and eras) in recent memory. Stevens' interest in political and historical events, like his faith in poetry, waxes and wanes. No doubt a measure of his reaction to the political left or to the actions of

Japan in World War II is directly tied to his alternating absorption in his Dutch ancestry, which he associates with a long-standing tradition of American values and loyalty on which the United States was founded. Similarly, he was often torn between a desire to write “pure” poetry and a desire to respond to events in the world around him, as in “Lettres d’un Soldat,” “Owl’s Clover,” and “Esthétique du Mal.” Neither mode of poetry is particularly representative of Stevens’ work; only when one considers them in tandem, as one man’s changing response to a changing world, can one classify anything as representative of Stevens, as in these stanzas from “Reply to Papini”:

The world is still profound and in its depths
Man sits and studies silence and himself,

Abiding the reverberations in the vaults.
Now, once, he accumulates himself and time

For humane triumphals. But a politics
Of property is not an area

For triumphals. These are hymns appropriate to
The complexities of the world, when apprehended,

The intricacies of appearance, when perceived. (*CP* 447)

Thus, to ask why Stevens needs a space away from reality is to ask the wrong question. A more relevant question asks how he negotiates what he calls his “agreement with reality” (*NA* 54), a phrase loaded with the metaphors of compromise and justification. For Stevens, reality is fraught with desire. To exist is to desire. To live in the world is to desire. In fact, Stevens would say that our incessant desire connects us as humans, and he returns to the site of poetry as a means not only to pursue that desire but also to illuminate why it remains a social reality. In 1952, late in his poetic career, he admits that “the desire to combine the two things, poetry and reality, is a constant desire” (*L* 760). To come to terms with reality and our role in it means ultimately to come to terms with desire, but it also forces the poet to confront the limitations of language. Though Stevens discovers the indeterminacy of language over time, Paz initiates his poetic quest by asking these questions of language; thus, perhaps the most intriguing access to Stevens’ poetic desire requires us to take a detour through the labyrinth of Paz, who, more than any other poet, perpetually seeks a mode of relation through desire: “[T]he poem is an empty space but one charged with imminence. It is not yet presence: it is a swarm of signs that seek their meaning and whose only meaning is that they are a search” (*Bow and Lyre* 243). Like those of Stevens, Paz’s poems function as inscriptions of desire—desire for fulfillment, ecstasy, meaning, the Other, resolution. Indeed, Stevens and Paz are united by a shared vision of the

interplay of art, absence, and presence, and the thread poetry weaves through each.

Whether Paz, like Stevens or Rilke, ever locates what he seeks remains open for debate; however, why he seeks so passionately is less ambiguous. As critics such as Saul Yurkievich and Giuseppe Bellini have noted, Paz's desire for all of the above, especially the Other and Otherness, is grounded in a desire to recover one's original condition. For Paz, the original condition of the Mexican has been masked or erased by conquest and emptiness, and I would argue that this notion of erasure or absence is intimately related to Stevens' desire to experience the world unnamed and unexpressed, where language becomes more than a simple utterance.⁸ For Paz, to speak in that language is not to speak in the language of Manifest Destiny or in the language of the ontology of America; it is to return sound to the voice that has not *done* the conquering but that was silenced by it:

En un poema leo:
conversar es divino.
Pero los dioses no hablan:
hacen, deshacen mundos
mientras los hombres hablan.
.....

La palabra del hombre
es hija de la muerte.
Hablamos porque somos
mortales: las palabras
no son signos, son años.

[I read in a poem:
to talk is divine.
But the gods don't speak:
they make and unmake worlds
while men do the talking.
.....

The word of man
is the daughter of death.
We talk because we are
mortal: words
are not signs, they are years.] (544–45)

Thus, our society, our sanity, our sense of self rely on the simple act of communication. The space Paz seeks to create for his poetry is one that facilitates and engenders a mode of dialogue that can speak to the Mexican's and the human's need to regain identity. Words, then, become more than semiotic or lexical symbols on the page; they become shifting,

breathing, pregnant *instantes* [instances] in which we discover the tenuous relationship between the self, language, and society.

Since Stevens and Paz bring to their poems utterly distinct assumptions about the self, how they treat its slippery notions also varies. Better put, Paz's poetic vision alters less clearly than Stevens', and Stevens' shifts radically. The early Stevens, the Stevens of "Tea at the Palaz of Hoon," most reflects the romantic topos of creation as self-location:

Not less because in purple I descended
The western day through what you called
The loneliest air. . . .

Out of my mind the golden ointment rained,
And my ears made the blowing hymns they heard.
I was myself the compass of that sea:

I was the world in which I walked, and what I saw
Or heard or felt came not but from myself;
And there I found myself more truly and more strange.

(CP 65)

What we find in this passage is the inception of what Paz will call the "new reality": the poet literally creates the self by creating the poem. The new reality is the reality that the self is present, immediate, and commanding. Within the space of the poem, the poet "finds" what he seeks: a heightened, rarefied version of the self.⁹ Easily unearthed is Stevens' dual desire for movement ("I descended," "the golden ointment rained," "I walked," "I saw," "I found") and the desire to fix and authoritatively situate the self ("I found myself"). The poet finds himself in the finite space he creates, a space impervious to unruly forces. Employing (Pazian) metaphors of myth and mask, Joseph Riddel argues that "[t]he mythical Hoon is one of Stevens' first successful masks" (64). Riddel makes such a claim to support his declaration that Hoon is merely a transcendent persona and that the real Stevens is much less self-assured. Still, if Hoon is a mask, then we must ask what Stevens is hiding? What or who is Stevens' "real" self? Could it be that he, like Paz, senses mimetic emptiness or facelessness? Indeed, Stevens continually provides more answers than questions, which is one reason why he is occasionally criticized for his poetic maneuverings. To respond to questions requires more critical and cultural acumen than to respond to statements or assertions. Thus, a poetry of speculation appears far less dramatic and less pertinent than a poetry of remonstrance.

Paz's companion piece to "Tea at the Palaz of Hoon" is his opening lyric, his prologue to his first collection *Libertad Bajo Palabra* [*Freedom on Oath or Freedom under Word*], in which he, in Stevensian fashion, creates the self and the landscape out of the word: "Invento la vispera, la noche, el día siguiente qe se lavanta en su lecho de piedra. . . . Contra el silencio y

el bullicio invento la Palabra, libertad que se inventa y me inventa cada dia" ["I invent evening, night, the next day rising from its bed of stone. . . . Against the silence and uproar I invent the Word, freedom that invents itself and me every day"] (*Obra Poetica* 17–18). Where Stevens' poem suggests his invention is a new or better (or transcendent) self, Paz implies the ability to invent his real self. In both poems, the self is created by being transformed into another reality and by working *against* formidable forces. For instance, in "Tea at the Palaz of Hoon," the poetic self battles both "The loneliest air" (*CP* 65) and the sea's tide, both of which inhibit the self's ascendance. Likewise, Paz must also battle chaos in an attempt to create freedom from the urgency of intellectual and social oppression. Clearly, these poems are the work of two young, eager, emboldened poets who, in their debut collections, hot off the heels of transcendentalism and *modernismo*, desperately crave to dispel any notions of weakened imaginative ability. In short, these inchoate poems come off as attempts of self-locating and reassurances of poetic prowess. Nevertheless, I would suggest that an additional interpretation should consider the tropes of self-positioning as metaphors for possible political and social efficacy. If the poet, the most marginalized and alienated of citizens, can carve his voice into the chaos of the modern world, his access to language and to realization might serve as a facilitative model not only for his direct readership, but also for everyone who participates in a common language. Perhaps the poets' stance feels naive in retrospect, but it remains clear that for both Paz and Stevens, the poetic and creative acts operate as viable sources of personal and societal agency.

Many years later, Paz answers this poem in a moving stanza from *Pasado en Claro* [*A Draft of Shadows*]. Written in 1974 when Paz was sixty years old, the poem deviates a bit from the poem written at age twenty. Here, the unity of the early lyric finds disjuncture:

Dios sin cuerpo,
con lenguajes de cuerpo lo nombraban
mis sentidos.

.....
Estoy en donde estuve:
voy dentrá's del murmullo,
pasos dentro de mí, oídos con los ojos,
el murmullo es mental, yo soy mis pasos,
oigo las voces que yo pienso,
las voces que me piensan al pensarlas.
Soy la sombra que arrojan mis palabras.

[Bodiless god,
my senses named it
in the languages of the body.

.....

I am where I was:
I walk behind the murmur,
footsteps within me, heard with my eyes,
the murmur is in the mind, I am my footsteps,
I hear the voices that I think,
the voices that think me as I think them.
I am the shadow my words cast.] (462–65)

Less secure forty years later, the poet's Whitman-like persona is expendable. Previously, the self, the body, the poem, and the external cohere through the internalization of the lyric "I"; here, we find the voice of the poet and his murmur in anteriority. The poet is other, separate from his voice, which is itself a projection. Moreover, there is no clear sense of boundaries for the one creating, a fuzziness that recalls Stevens' poem "Desire & the Object." Equally nebulous is the delineation between shadow and substance, presence and absence: the words, which are vocal, not visual, are presence, while the corporeality of the body becomes absence. In Paz, words usurp the body and permeate the borders of language. Language is privileged and the body marginalized; yet the body, with its shadows and borders, is indistinguishable and inexorable from words. Thus, the power of imagination experiences reality by turning its transforming ability not so much against reality (as in the early poems) as against the self. If we view the power of the imagination through a Foucaultian lens, we realize that both Stevens and Paz possess startling power because they possess the Word, the *logos*, but they do more than merely subject the world to their power; they subject themselves as well.¹⁰ Thus, the subject of the poems and of the imagination is not just the self, but the subjected self, and the self, like the text, becomes flux and process, indistinguishable from language. Put in Nietzschean terms, neither the poem nor the poet ever finally *be*, but remain in the process of *becoming*, like Stevens' clouds in "The Auroras of Autumn": "It is of cloud transformed / To cloud transformed again, idly, the way / A season changes color to no end. . . ." (CP 416). In order to respond adequately to the shifts of language and to society, one's poetry and one's self must also transform, like the cloud itself. Such fluctuation necessitates not a poetry grounded in particular movements or ideologies but one that is free to float among the clouds of human existence.

That Paz's answer to his youthful poem reverses his previous stance on the confidence of poetic self-mapping is not at all surprising, especially if we read it against Stevens' "The Planet on the Table." Written at the age of seventy-four, it marks a departure from an early faith in the imagination as well as the conviction that one must always create a new reality. Content to transgress his own boundaries, Stevens, like Paz, forces us to redefine definition: "His self and the sun were one / And his poems, although makings of his self, / Were no less makings of the sun" (CP 532). Where

the Prospero-like Hoon craves determinacy, the flighty, androgynous Ariel opts for indeterminacy (or perhaps an indeterminate determinacy). The difference between Paz's poems and Stevens' is that Paz more readily senses that his poems are disjunctive. Yet, both lyrics present a final foregrounding not of the poetic self, nor really of the poems themselves, but of the poetic act, reflective of the world in which they were written:

It was not important that they survive.
What mattered was that they should bear
Some lineament or character,

Some affluence, if only half-perceived,
In the poverty of their words,
Of the planet of which they were part. (CP 532–33)

Again, the subtexts suggest that what is incumbent upon the act of writing a poem is that after the shell of the body falls away, and after the self is negligible, what we are left with are the words—Janus-faced words, spoken from the past yet propelled toward the future, always in motion. To supply these words is to attempt to connect. To write the poem is to give to society the grammar of its own cohesion.

If we are left only with the words themselves, what is the relationship between the poet and the poem? What is the relation between the poem and its audience? For both Paz and Stevens, the poem is fundamentally connected to desire, which is fundamentally connected to the human condition. On this topic, Jason Wilson claims that “[p]oetry for Paz is not a formal, aesthetic exercise, but it is his very being manifesting itself in the space of desire” (*Study* 5). Wilson's words apply to Stevens as well. Perhaps we should consider Wilson's topos of space over Wood's, noting that space is not by any means a fixed space or a space of being but one of becoming, a space in which the poem, poet, and the public interact. The notion of becoming, which is simultaneously also an act of devolving, is by its very nature attached to desire. For Paz and Stevens, something is always missing. What the poets seek may not be presence but absence. But even if what is absent, what is longed for, is never realized, the longing always remains, the concurrent longing for past, future, and present. As Roy Harvey Pearce, Helen Vendler, and others have suggested, to create the new, the poet must decreate the old, and to decreate the old is to return to nothing, to return to “la doble página / del papel y del día” [“the double page / of day and paper”] (594–95).¹¹ To return perpetually to desire is, to refer to Stevens' “The World as Meditation,” to emulate Penelope's eternal act of undoing the web. Thus, the landscape of the new reality is constantly being recreated by the basic creation of the poetic text. Once again, the poet must confront absence—the absence of the page, the absence of the new reality, and the absence of the old reality. In his poem to Luis Cernuda, appropriately, Paz speaks of this same desire:

Deseada
 la realidad se desea
se inventa un cuerpo de centella
se desdobra y se mira
 sus mil ojos
la pulen como mil manos fanáticas. . . .

Con letra clara el poeta escribe
sus verdades oscuras. . . .

[Desired
 reality desires itself
invents a body of lightning
bends over and looks at itself
 its thousand eyes
polish it like a thousand fanatical hands. . . .

With clear letters the poet writes
his dark truths. . . .] (58–59)¹²

The dark truths that Paz writes are by his own admission not truths at all but constructions: “La poesía no es la verdad. . . . La poesía, / como la historia, se hace; / la poesía, / como la verdad, se ve” [“Poetry is not truth. . . . / Poetry, / like history, is made; / poetry, / like truth, is seen”] (422–23). Often truth contradicts itself, and that which is the most contradictory is often the most true. Desire, which always undermines its own force, is itself a contradiction, and thus, as Paz suggests, the only truth is: “un sola verdad / Realidad y deseo” [“a single truth / Reality and desire”] (60–61). Interestingly, Stevens’ life is a contradiction at times: staid conservative lawyer by day, impassioned spelunker of the dark abysses of the self by night; moderate to right-wing politically, a revolutionary on the poetic front. Painfully aware is Stevens of the incongruities of the human soul and of the incessance of desire:

There was so much that was real that was not real at all.
He wanted to feel the same way over and over.

He wanted the river to go on flowing the same way,
To keep on flowing. He wanted to walk beside it,

Under the buttonwoods, beneath a moon nailed fast.
He wanted his heart to stop beating and his mind to rest. . . .
(CP 425)

In this poem, Stevens’ conflicting desires for constancy and fluidity mirror our own. Like us, he longs for comfort without monotony, and once again he is pulled by the dual desires of motion and stasis, of perpetuity

and foundation, of determinacy and indeterminacy, of solitude and contingency. One desires all this, yet "one desires / So much more than that" (CP 193). Despite what many of his poems and critics suggest, Stevens does not consistently long to escape reality, for as he and we well know, reality is desire, and desire is reality. Thus, to engage desire is to engage the reality of one's existence; it is "To keep flowing," for as Wilson says, "[d]esire is a *path towards* an ever elusive goal" (Study 101). Here, reality, poetry, and society are inextricably linked, and we remain uncertain which creation is contingent on which—reality on poetry or poetry on reality. Ultimately, the question is irrelevant, and neither Paz nor Stevens really expect to find any hard and fast answers to the questions they pose: their language is deliberately ambiguous and their motives not altogether crystalline. If that were not enough, the satisfaction they may receive by arriving at some sort of resolution is either undermined or augmented or negated (or all of the above) by an equally questionable resolution in another poem.

It is worth asking, then, why these two absorbing figures repeatedly return to the site of poetry. Paz, especially, is pulled in so many different directions: essays, art criticism, cultural criticism, literary criticism, biography, and political commentary, yet he interminably returns to the terror and absence of the blank page. For Stevens, poetry serves, on the one hand, as his note toward a supreme fiction, his poem to replace the idea of God: "The poem refreshes life so that we share, / For a moment, the first idea. . . . / The poem, through candor, brings back a power again / That gives a candid kind to everything" (CP 382). Stevens would later question this statement because, on the other hand, poetry forces us to come to terms with indeterminacy: "the poem makes meanings of the rock, / Of such mixed motion and such imagery / That its barrenness becomes a thousand things / And so exists no more" (CP 527). I am less inclined to agree with Harold Bloom's claims of unity and finality in "The Rock," nor do I assent to his assertion that these lines demonstrate "the largest claims for poetry and for the poet" (351). Instead, I prefer Longenbach's reading, which suggests that in "The Rock" and in "The Course of a Particular" (Stevens' immediate rewriting of "The Rock"), Stevens "rejects any such wholeness—especially a wholeness manufactured by poetry" (298). Like the rock's barrenness, the poem becomes a thousand things, one of which is *its* own barrenness. Thus, in the language of J. Hillis Miller's famous reading of the poem, Stevens undermines his own linguistic intentionality in an attempt to imply subtextually that poetry is not a "cure" for anything—it is simply "a perspective that begins again. . . . The starting point of the human and the end" (CP 528).

That Paz, too, can find in poetry a means of salvation is a reasonable statement. In this sense, he resembles the great Peruvian poet César Vallejo: both assent to poetry's absence, its meaninglessness, its inauthority, but both invest in it the vast spectrum of emotions of human living. As Paz,

Vallejo, and others have stated, it is not the form or product of poetry that is important, but the act. In a later poem Paz writes:

. . . la poesía.
Se desliza
entre el sí y el no:
dice
lo que callo,
calla
lo que digo,
sueña
lo que olvido.
No es un decir:
es un hacer.
[. . . poetry.
It slips
between yes and no,
says
what I keep silent,
keeps silent
what I say,
dreams
what I forget.
It is not speech:
it is an act.] (484–85)

Poetry is what the poet is not; it is the invisible, the absent, the angel that disappears in the final stanza of “Angel Surrounded by Paysans.” Paz’s language also reminds us of what Stevens has to say about poetry in “Of Modern Poetry”—that it is “in the *act* of finding / What will suffice” (CP 239; emphasis added). For Paz, the act of poetry is the act of inhabiting the uninhabitable (language) but also the habitable (society). To write is to speak the liminal, to roam the empty spaces between text and page, between speech and writing, between silence and talking. Paz is not disillusioned by poetry in the way Stevens is by the time he writes “The Rock,” since Paz rarely expects more of it than what it can offer. Paz may want the word to do more, but for him poetry remains primarily a generative and connective endeavor, not a potentially supreme construction. In many ways, Stevens appears a postmodernist trapped inside the body of a romantic/modernist: he is skeptical of many of his desires, but he can really do nothing about them. Early Paz reads more like a modernist/surrealist unwittingly trapped inside the body of a postmodernist, and it has taken him a few years, a few failures, some acerbic criticism, and forays into alternative areas before he has come to terms with his own desires and the inconclusiveness of postmodernism. His most recent book, *Árbol Adentro*

[*A Tree Within*] (1987), is his strongest book to date and his most speculative, and, like Stevens' final collection, it is also one of his most human. Ultimately, Paz's and Stevens' poems resonate with their audiences because the poems reflect a human tendency to contradict and to change.

How, in the final analysis, do the poems of Stevens and Paz enact relationality among the desires of the poet and the needs and desires of the people who not only read their works but also inhabit the same earth? We could surmise that Stevens' ever-shifting stance on poetry and its relevance to human activity is potentially related to inscriptive ideas of events such as the Great Depression, the American Dream, the New Deal, and the perceived postwar euphoria of the 1950s. As Longenbach and Filreis have shown, Stevens' poetic aspirations and expectations shift not only in relation to personal events but also in relation to American historical events. No doubt, he hopes his poetry achieves a certain fruition, a fruition he feels America has already achieved. Furthermore, it could be that he feels he has little at stake in his poems—he does not suffer political or social oppression, he has a wife, a job, art for his walls, a nice house, financial security. Paz, on the other hand, has a great deal at stake in his poems. He senses the degrees of Mexico's spiritual destitution, and he sees poetry, art, and dialogue as the carriers of the message that can save the people of his country from tyranny and ignorance and propitiate their convictions that they are spiritually and politically bereft and homeless. Paz sees himself on a mission to bring to his people the passion of direction that the United States possesses (and perhaps, one might say, that Stevens embodies), but has, apparently, chosen to ignore. However, one could argue that an approach more consonant with the thrust of the poems discussed here is one that acknowledges notions of deferral, desire, and absence, that the precise personal and societal forces behind Paz's and Stevens' poetics should remain as elusive and indeterminate as the poems themselves.

Rather than simply stating the news in the poems, Paz and Stevens involve their readers in the questions they propose. The indeterminacy of Paz's and Stevens' poems craves and even seduces readers so that the poems exist in a world of cohabitation and connectivity (Filreis 276–77). In fact, recent intertextual criticism argues that it is incumbent upon the reader to complete the incompleteness of a text, that the reader essentially produces both text and intertext.¹³ Indeed, Stevens and Paz would claim that it is the reader's responsibility to meet the poet halfway and be willing to extend oneself to make a connection, and it is in that act of engagement where the personal converges with the political and where the desire of the poet conflates with the desire of the reader. Though such an interpretation lurks within the forest of Stevens' opus, the notion that the poem needs and relies on the reader's own attenuations of absence and desire becomes augmented by the matrix of Stevens and Paz primarily because Paz provides verification that a poetry of speculation and desire can function as a poetry of social and political relevance and illumination. Like the

epigraphs that begin this essay, the similarities in Stevens and Paz remind us that the space of poetry, dually created and ruptured by the poet and the reader, are manifestations of both poets' and readers' desire to find spaces within the flux of the world; a desire to disclose "in the poverty of their words" a connection to "the planet of which they [are] part."

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Notes

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¹See Perloff's intriguing and infamous essay, "Revolving in Crystal: The Supreme Fiction and the Impasse of Modernist Lyric."

²Unless otherwise noted, all citations to Paz's poems are from the bilingual *The Collected Poems of Octavio Paz: 1957–1987*. The page numbers in parentheses refer to both the Spanish version and to Eliot Weinberger's translation, which are *en face*. The translation from *Obra Poetica* is my own.

³In the various letters between Stevens and the Cuban poet, editor, and translator, Stevens reveals certain xenophobic or isolationist tendencies along with a genuine interest in the daily activities and colorful details of José's life in Cuba. This dialogic pull in all its contradictions pervades all aspects of Stevens' life and career. The letters disclose both the cold, standoffish, and brusque Stevens as well as the vulnerable, warm, compassionate, and forthcoming Stevens. Those who argue that Stevens is either one or the other are unable to awaken from their dualistic slumber. If there is anything that these letters, the studies of Filreis and Longenbach, as well as this article illustrate, it is that Stevens is far too complex to be reduced to an autotelic or New Critical taxonomy of either/or.

In one of his letters to José, Stevens displays his ignorance of Mexican and Mayan art: "One great difficulty about everything Mexican is the appalling interest of the Indians: the Mayas, and so on. . . . After all, few writers tell us what we really want to know about the Indians. . . . I have yet to feel about any Maya that he was made of clay. Publications like *Cuadernos Americanos* convince one that he was made of putty" (L 543; Coyle/Filreis 92). Obviously, despite the fact that he knows little about it, Stevens is critical of the very society from which Paz derives much of his poetic inspiration—a mildly humorous but somewhat disappointing coincidence.

⁴I am grateful to Wayne Woodward for his insightful comments on communication and communication theory not only in regard to this specific point but also in regard to various notions of communication referred to throughout the essay.

⁵The other study linking Paz and Stevens is by John Zubizarreta, who connects Stevens and Paz via Ruben Darío and by way of the trio's interest in French symbolism and in the Parnassians. His point is to show that three utterly different modern poets all seek influences in the same poetic history.

⁶Paz would be especially familiar with the metaphor of residing in the world: Pablo Neruda's great poetic trilogy, which transformed Latin American literature, is entitled *Residencia en la Tierra* [*Living on the Earth*]. Neruda's collections champion partaking in the earth, soaking up everything life, the world, and the earth radiate. Although Paz certainly indulges himself more than Stevens, the metaphor is apropos for both.

⁷The similarities between Paz's definition of poetry as a non-formal enterprise and Stevens' as a "vital" enterprise are striking: "[T]o me, poetry is not a literary activity: it is a vital activity" (L 815).

⁸The history and authority of Adam perpetually fascinate Paz. Not only was Adam the first man to name and to speak, but also the first to make love. Paz wants to recoup the passion and primacy of Adam. For Paz, making love and creating poetry are two sides of the same coin in their attempt to reconcile the Cartesian duality of body and spirit, imagination and reality, life and death, man and woman. In doing so, one erases the boundaries of history and temporality in which “[t]odo es contemporáneo, actual, presente. Los tiempos se congregan para mostrarse en una unidad detenida e inmensa” [“everything is contemporaneous, current, present. Time comes together to illustrate an arrested and immense unity”] (Yurkievich 322).

⁹That Stevens blurs the peripheries of the reader, the self, the world, and the poem is not a radically new concept. In fact, Stevens himself explicitly connects the poem to the self: “with a true poet his poetry is the same thing as his vital self. It is not possible for anyone else to touch it” (L 815).

¹⁰See Foucault’s discussion of the subject/object dichotomy and his claim of dual subjects; thus, the subject of the self is not merely the self, but the “subjected self” (221–22).

¹¹The poem from which this quotation derives, “Primero de Enero” [“January First”], finds conspicuous resonances in Stevens’ poems on creation and renewal. Here is the whole passage:

mañana
habrá que trazar unos signos,
dibujar un paisaje, tejer una trama
sobre la doble página
del papel y del día.
Mañana habrá que inventar,
de nuevo,
la realidad de este mundo.

[tomorrow
we shall have to think up signs,
sketch a landscape, fabricate a plan
on the double page
of day and paper.
Tomorrow, we shall have to invent,
once more,
the reality of this world.] (594–95)

¹²Cernuda’s influence on Paz’s concept of desire is enormous. Both Cernuda and Paz hold that a person’s true self, his or her identity, is inexorably linked with desire—that he or she is a being of desire as much as a desire of being. See the chapter entitled “Inspiration” in *The Bow and the Lyre*, 140–63. Paz’s “a thousand eyes” recalls Stevens’ “It is a visibility of thought / In which hundreds of eyes, in one mind, see at once” (CP 488).

¹³See Michael Riffaterre. For an engaging reading of Stevens and intertext, see B. J. Leggett.

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A Note on Peter Quince's Clavier

ERIC LEUSCHNER

EVOKING IMAGES OF Shakespeare's rustic playing a harpsichord, the first three lines of Wallace Stevens' poem "Peter Quince at the Clavier" suggest Peter Quince is playing a musical instrument:

Just as my fingers on these keys
Make music, so the selfsame sounds
On my spirit make a music, too. (CP 89)

The surprising image of Peter Quince juxtaposed with the traditionally baroque instrument is typical of Stevens, whose delightfully aural images range from the onomatopoeic "tink and tank and tunk-a-tunk-tunk" of "A High-Toned Old Christian Woman" to the "hoo-hoo-hoo, / Its shoo-shoo-shoo, its ric-a-nic" (CP 131) of "Mozart, 1935." The first lines of "Peter Quince at the Clavier" suggest Stevens is concerned with the transformation of the sound of reality into the soundlessness of the imagination, and critics typically assume Peter Quince is playing an instrument to be heard. However, that Peter Quince's clavier may be a silent practice keyboard—in other words, mute—is often overlooked. Kinereth Meyer and Sharon Baris previously suggested the silent clavier, but only as an explanation for the first lines of the poem and they provide no argument for Stevens' familiarity with it. The silent clavier was readily knowable for Stevens, and in fact, the mute keyboard may even reappear in Stevens. In addition, understanding the instrument as such clarifies the incongruity between Peter Quince, an untutored rustic from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and the clavier, a rather delicate, high-society instrument.

While the definition of *clavier* encompasses any keyboard instrument, it also includes "practice instruments that have silent keyboards ('dumb claviers')" (Ripin 428). The "Virgil Practice Clavier," invented by an American, Almon Kincaid Virgil (1842–1921), enjoyed a vogue in the last years of the nineteenth century; by 1896, over 3,600 instruments had been manufactured by the A. K. Virgil Practice Clavier Company of New York City (Nahm 51). The silent practice clavier was essential to Virgil's new pedagogical method emphasizing technique. During the next twenty years, Virgil established clavier academies in New York, London, Berlin, Chicago, Boston, and St. Petersburg, Florida. He published his ideas in a cor-

respondence course, several journals, and numerous texts and promoted his ideas through lectures and demonstrations abroad and at home, including recitals¹ held at Clavier Hall, built at the New York school located at 11 West 22nd Street, which would seat several hundred people. Virgil also received endorsements from such musicians as Carlyle Petersilea, William Mason, Florenz Ziegfeld, Ignacy Paderewski, and Vladimir De Pachmann (Nahm 52–54). More than a faddish curiosity, the Virgil method and accompanying instrument made quite an impact at the turn of the century.²

Stevens would probably have known the subtle meaning of the clavier as a practice keyboard and have exploited it in the poem. His interest in music is widely documented and is exhibited in his letters and journals. Also known is Stevens' penchant for creatively using a dictionary. In his oral biography of Stevens, Peter Brazeau includes remarks by several assistants at the Hartford Insurance Company who detail their trips to the library to look up a word, presumably for inclusion in his poetry. Charles O'Dowd, for one, remembers reading words in Stevens' correspondence that did not seem to fit:

I would do exactly what [Stevens] used to do all the time: go out into the law library and get Webster's big dictionary, look [up] the word, and sure enough, it was right on the spot. . . . Maybe it was the tenth or twelfth meaning, but it would be exactly the word that fitted what he was trying to get across. . . . [H]e would go after a precise, even though remote, meaning. (Brazeau 40)³

The silent keyboard may appear elsewhere in Stevens. In "Piano Practice at the Academy of the Holy Angels" Stevens describes what some have identified as his own childhood experience at St. John's Lutheran Church, but which may also be the image of a music academy. This poem too describes a moment of silence—just before the children begin to practice. Each child is described, but Rosa, "the muslin dreamer of satin and cowry-kin," disdains "the empty keys" and by association, the "long, black instruments [that] will be so little to them that will be needing so much, seeking so much in their music" (*OP* 42). In "Esthétique du Mal" Stevens describes a scene reminiscent of "Peter Quince at the Clavier":

When B. sat down at the piano and made
A transparence in which we heard music, made music,
In which we heard transparent sounds, did he play
All sorts of notes? Or did he play only one
In an ecstasy of its associates,
Variations in the tones of a single sound,
The last, or sounds so single they seemed one? (*CP* 316)

If B. is the deaf Beethoven, the contrast between sound and silence is pronounced. It may be as anachronistic to place Beethoven at a clavier as it is to put Peter Quince there, but as in "Peter Quince at the Clavier" it is the act of the mind—the silence—creating the music that is the focus. In a letter to Elsie written in 1909, Stevens says:

What is the mysterious effect of music, the vague effect we feel when we hear music, without ever defining it? . . . [T]hose long chords on the harp, always so inexplicably sweet to me, vibrate on more than the "sensual ear"—vibrate on the unknown . . . And what one listens to at a concert, if one knew it, is not only the harmony of sounds, but the whispering of innumerable responsive spirits within one, momentarily revived, that stir like the invisible motions of the mind wavering between dreams and sleep. . . . (L 136)

It seems appropriate for Peter Quince, the mechanical from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, to play a "dumb" keyboard. For all his aspirations and actions, he produces nothing, and this silence is crucial for the poem to create the desired effect. As elsewhere in his poetry, Stevens presents two contrasting readings in the same poem. The intent of the poem is indeed the music of the spheres, or of the soul, but that music is the soundless music of the clavier as mute instrument, directly analogous to the soundless music of the imagination.

The first two lines state that Peter Quince makes music. Peter Quince, however, cannot make music; if anything he would make noise with his grandiose and false pretensions. In the source play, Peter Quince "play'd on this prologue like a child on a recorder—a sound, but not in government" (V.i.122–24). In Stevens' poem, for all his intent, he produces nothing—the silent instrument prevents him, forcing the physical Peter Quince into the imaginative world of the silent Susanna.

Ellwood Johnson states that to understand Stevens' concept of the imagination the reader must understand the line "Music is feeling, then, not sound" (CP 90). Johnson observes that the "object of experience here is the vibration in the air, sound waves from Peter Quince's clavier, which stimulate the auditory sense of the subject, but are changed in the experience of the listening mind" (29). He then suggests that the opposition is between music in reality and music as perceived and that there is a significant distinction between the two concepts. However, I would argue that Stevens speaks literally when he says "Music is feeling, then, not sound." Music, and, as such, pleasure, does not belong to the physical; it belongs to the mind:

And thus it is that what I feel,
Here in this room, desiring you,

Thinking of your blue-shadowed silk,
Is music. (CP 90)

“Peter Quince at the Clavier” is structured around the disruption of the music of silence by noise and requires silence up until the moment of Susanna’s disclosure. The noise of the Elders, anticipated in their “witching chords” and “Puls[ing] pizzicati,” disturbs the pleasure of Susanna, who is described in terms of the silent harmonies of imagined music:

Of a green evening, clear and warm,
She bathed in her still garden. . . .

.....

In the green water, clear and warm,
Susanna lay.
She searched
The touch of springs,
And found
Concealed imaginings.
She sighed,
For so much melody. (CP 90)

The imagery elicits tranquility, a silent communing with nature (“green”), quite opposed to the intrusive noise of the Elders (“A cymbal crashed, / And roaring horns”) and the “noise like tambourines” of the attending Byzantines. Like beauty, music “is momentary in the mind— / The fitful tracing of a portal; / But in the flesh it is immortal.” Sounds are transitory, but perception given body and wholeness (the “blue-shadowed silk,” the “green going” of evening, the cyclical garden’s “meek breath scenting / The cowl of winter”) is eternal, playing on the “clear viol” of memory. For Peter Quince at the clavier, it is the feeling behind the physical touch on the keys and not any sound that forms the basis of his creation. And it is this knowledge—music as embodied feeling and not sound—that makes the definition of the clavier, as a silent instrument, so enticing.

University of Missouri-Columbia

Notes

¹“Virgil recitals frequently included, midway through the program, a demonstration (by either students or faculty) of exercises performed in a particular order and at specified metronomic markings. After this display, [Virgil] would generally take the opportunity to offer a few pertinent comments on some selected pedagogical or philosophical topic” (Nahm 53–54).

²Virgil’s was not the only practice clavier in production at the time. Virgil’s wife, Antha, divorced around 1900, remarried Amos Bergman who obtained eight patents for practice clavier design and established the Bergman-Virgil factory and clavier school.

The aforementioned Carlyle Petersilea also invented a mute piano (Nahm 54). There were also less expensive keyboards such as the Wilder Keyboard and Neely Keyboard, priced at about fifteen dollars, and often used in public school music classes (National Bureau 31).

³The definition of the clavier as a practice keyboard does not appear in the *OED* or other dictionaries, except the *New International*.

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Poems

A Sly-Boned Old Politician Man

Politics is the supreme fiction, sir.
Take the moral lawyer; make a slave of him
And from the slave create a vaunted maven. Thus,
The conscience is converted without qualms,
Like taking money for sermons, with loud amens.
We disagree on party lines. That's clear. But take
A proposed law and make a compromise,
And from the compromise select a task
Beyond the planners. Thus, our tawdriness,
Unpurged by ethics, indulgently passed,
Is neatly perverted by greasy palms,
Haggling with such finesse. And arm in arm,
Sir, we have it in the bag. Next send,
Therefore, out on the parliamentary stage,
Our much-respected party whips, well-versed,
Taking their sleazy beliefs on parade,
Proud of their proclivity for the sub rosa,
With drinks and lunch and tête-à-tête talk,
Will, surely will, sir, win for ourselves
A genial hurrah or two, from our peers.
This is why voters vote. And lying words
Work as they will. Work most when voters vote.

Tony Wilson
San Marcos, Texas

The Custard of Voilà

The custard's instant, and the egg
on top makes a few
feel allergic,
but the spoons get to the sink somehow,

and somehow and somehow today is a day
because rabbits blow horns,
ta-da, ta-da,
because of Jamie's blue eyes and the custard of voilà.

En café Belgian lops guffaw,
"The only custard is the custard of voilà."

John Millett
Alexandria, Va.

The The

Knowing nothing, knowing neither, knowing only
The intermittent geyser, fountain, volcano
Or glacier happily retreating or advancing
Sunrise and sunset, knowing one after another
Bleeding and breeding and knowing nothing,
Going black and knowing the moon and stars,
Going blue and knowing sunlight's white disk
And clouds, knowing nothing better
Than knowing something wrong, better
Than living noisily and irrelevant
Or just too long, or else redeemed
By the raw sweetness and honest
Bleakness of a crow that caws hello
On an empty frozen day despite blackness
And disdain and knowing nothing.

Kenneth Rosen
Portland, Maine

What Lola— A Dog Brought Up On Wallace Stevens—

Hears: a pleasant kerchunk
of the refrigerator, whose door closes;

the click of claws on dew-wet grass,
when the neighbor's pied cat comes

crouching, teasing; the clackle, clackle, clackle of the bike
that bastard kid rides;

nothing I say
except, maybe, if I whisper
"cookie," she'll cock (intently) her eye.

Ruth Moon Kempfer
St. Augustine, Fla.

Someone Overuses a Pager

To speak directly to you, or not to do so,
Is to choose between the fear of the proximate
And the fear of the distant, as in the fear of

Impending emptinesses, of a vacuum coldness
Mocking the bleak warmings of memory. Or
The fear of clarity fogging in the voice's breath,

Of the heart become too human in the sight of
Your eyes. Yet everything is digitizable—these sunsets,
Those jetting geese—or can be allayed by digits.

When you hear the beep, the vibrations follow.
These bits traversing a screen of liquid crystal.
These emotional codes. Nearly formed, almost distant.

- 00000001 Means I hope you find this annoyance charming.
- 00000010 Means one of the boys may have fallen out of the
Garage loft, but probably not. Cancel this message.
- 00000100 Everything adds up. What it adds up to is another matter,
Which is why all accountants should have minored in
religion.
- 00001000 I see you writing, gripping the pen in that funny way
That has given you a callus on the tip of your middle finger.
- 00010000 The center depends on the margin. Order on chaos.
Degas scribbles randomly until a ballerina appears.
- 00100000 Call if you need help, or to tell me that you don't need help.
In either case, I will think I do not know what to do.
- 01000000 Every time I'm on a bridge I have a dizzying urge to
Jump off, unless it's arching over a pond filled with lilies.
- 10000000 It's me, only voiceless, a body of 0's and 1's, fears cycling
To a Boolean rhythm—on, off, on, off, on, off, on . . .
- 10000001 Milk pours silkily out of glass bottles. We're out of this milk.
Pick up a plastic gallon on your way home, noting the
decline.

- 10000010 The Twist, The Swim, Texas Line Dancing, Saturday Night
Fever Disco. This yearning for Waltzes, close and slow.
- 10000100 I miss you. River Birch, Norwegian Maple, Buckeye, Pin Oak.
Names I chant to branches black against purple winter sky.
- 10001000 This thing in 00001000. I know this. It is one of the
Smallest things I know. I smile because I know this. I do.
- 10010000 Within this numbering system only 256 distinct markings
Are possible: what I have to say is not infinite, only definite.
- 10100000 This sudden urge to dial. This red streaking
Through the thick pastels of Monet's Giverny.

Richard Ramirez Guzman
Naperville, Ill.

Reflections on a Shapely Form in Flight

*In order for there to be a mirror of the world it is
necessary that the world have a form.*

Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose*

What if the world were formless—what would there be
To shine upon itself, shape meaning, sight?
What is light without shadows to reflect,
Look back upon, regret? Nothing but sky—

An abstract emptiness. Reality
Needs a fact to demonstrate a fact:
The bee, the flower, the moving silhouette.
A hawk alighting in a barren tree

Becomes—in fact—a new reality.
Thinking of these things, I cast a stone
Skipping over the surface of a pond.

The stone transforms in flight; the stone becomes
A silver disk that skitters before it falls
Into a dim reflection of itself.

David George
Sacramento, Calif.

Stripling

*. . . in sacramental celebration of their earthly
truth, the bread symbolizing bread . . .*

—A. S. Byatt

All tend toward the body. When our first serpent
By wiles enraptured the legs and wrists of Eve,
And the slim appendages of Adam slunk
Onto the pitiless snake,
The beast's lithe body spread
Into four limbs and face—one spiritual star.

When Shelley on cool Italian evenings napped
Dreamily on the floor and hair toward blaze,
He unshadowed heady thoughts of Aeschylus—
A stroke that, in a scene to be believed,
Need not be seen to be believed:
The body of his work may be read by all.

I courted a woman tinderbox of old
Who fired five molding hearts at once (she closed
As I struck). "Insatiable and burdened clay!"
Count Tolstoy mourned,
Proceeding soon to thieve
A willing wife aged eighteen years, full-bodied.

Freud felt flesh as container, Tolstoy a shell,
Shelley the manifestation of soul—others ship,
Rudder, compass, ocean clasping the ship,
An admiral's cockade; sufficient for me
Tomorrow to plot discoveries
Along the body's scars, its manifest.

So let the mobile beauty of the serpent change
Like roots of seasons, stabler in the soil,
To human legs and arms: it slows him, slowly,
Yet that's his willed desire—
It bears him where
The body kissed creates the body loved.

Edward Locke
Canton, Mass.

Two Anecdotes

I

Whenever the garden starts dreaming
Of hurricanes,

Lizards dip their hissing tongues in shade.

It dreams of all
But the smallest hurricanes
When it dreams.

When it dreams,
Its blooms sway and sway
Over the lizard.

Even now, the garden, it's dreaming.
Of hurricanes.

Lizards, dip thy hissing tongues in shade!

Later, the lizard drapes itself across a bloom.
Like shade.

II

Whenever the yellow mum starts burning
In Old San Juan,

Lightning hots its foxy rashmahanic.

It burns some nights
All night—and sways all hot-slow-foxied
When it burns.

When it burns,
Its yellow head is a Chinese Tiger Rocket
Exploding over sand.

Even now, the yellow mum, it's burning.

In Old San Juan,
Lightning hots that foxy rashmahanic.

And every mother wishes she didn't have a son.
If she has a son.

Jay Hopler
Naples, Fla.

How Wallace Stevens Should Have Died

You're sure to have heard the official
release: Stevens pauses at a doorway,

in a white room dissected by
lines—diagonal—of white light.

His shoulders, the symmetry of the face
split by light and dark. He is

supremely prepared for indecision.
Stoicism molds his response, holds him,

too, in a pose of repose there, halfway
out of the light. When death comes

it is only a matter of repositioning
line, a sudden but insignificant

shuddering in the molecular field.
He is there, his gray business suit

is there—the scene transforming itself
before the observing walls into eternal

anticipation and resolve. Stasis.
Apotheosis. This may be just the way

it happened. Instead, it's 6 P.M. The round voice—
“And who gives a damn about assurances,

anyway”—to itself. From the window,
Stevens stares out at Hartford. Clear,

it's very clear in August. He's standing
at the window, hands in pockets. Nothing

much matters. A few leaves down. He
witnesses the afternoon, mulls over

the garden, his daughter, the cabinet full
of cases. “Purple sphere, our cartouche,

we once trundled through Duluth”
—when he catches, studies

his own face singing from the glass.
“The evening paper’s a bit late.”

And then, at last, when he can’t
expect it—it comes.

Steve Wilson
San Marcos, Texas

He Muses on the Hereness of Being

He hums while he muses. His hum
is here. No one else in Texas

hears him hum. The sound of sea
breaking on the rocks below

is there. When the sea breaks on his hum
like horns and oboes on a solo singer,

it is here and there at once.
From his *Schloß* along the Rhine,

the Teuton theologian *spricht*:
being there is being, *Dasein*.

But here is near, there is far.
Being is where we always are.

He hums along the Texas Gulf.
Above his hum the seagulls squawk

and plunge for food. Where they plunge
is their here when they are there.

But *being here* is not within their ken.
Musing about one’s being here

is being here. His solo humming
is the music of his musing.

And here at the oyster bar, *die Auster*
is the music of his musing’s being.

Warren Carrier
Galveston, Texas

Reviews

Wallace Stevens: A Spiritual Poet in a Secular Age.

By Charles M. Murphy. Mahwah, N. J.: Paulist Press, 1997.

This unusual study considers Stevens as a religious poet, placing his work in the tradition of Christian mysticism. Its author, Monsignor Murphy, is pastor of Holy Martyrs' Parish in Falmouth, Maine. The former rector of North American College in Vatican City, Monsignor Murphy is the author of *Foundations for a Catholic Ethic of the Environment*. Readers who are committed to the spiritual element in Stevens and who are open to approaches very different from current scholarship will be pleased with this book.

Wallace Stevens: A Spiritual Poet in a Secular Age is comprised of a hundred pages of discussion followed by a section containing the poems discussed; there is a brief bibliography but no index. The analysis is divided into five chapters, the titles of which represent what the book is and does. "Nomad Exquisite: The Life of the Poet as Spiritual Figure" gives a brief biography of Stevens with emphasis on his spiritual quest. "Pitiful Lovers of Earth: Finding the Way to God through the World" looks at some of Stevens' poems that explore various dimensions of "the world as meditation." "The Interior Par amour: Finding God within Oneself" details the poet's spiritual seeking, within and beyond the poems. (An evocative comparison in this chapter is that between Stevens and St. Ignatius of Loyola.) "Our Spiritual Climate: A New Ice Age" examines some of Stevens' chillier poems and images for their religious implications, and "The Religious Imagination in a Secular Age: Indications for Our Spiritual Life" defines Stevens' mysticism.

The biography section is interesting but surprising, as the elitist, somewhat unmannerly Stevens we meet in it may not be one we want to know. However, it is easy to understand the longings of this shy, socially awkward young Stevens as metaphysical. Nevertheless, what this book does best is to introduce Stevens' works as sources for meditation—the author's and ultimately the reader's. It is enlightening to see Stevens in the context of Nicholas of Cusa, St. John of the Cross, St. Ignatius of Loyola, and St. Teresa of Avila, as well as less surprising figures such as William James and George Santayana. Reading Stevens through Murphy's lenses invites us to perceive Stevens as a figure like Thoreau or Emerson but with a Christian slant—a philosopher-king through his poetry. The book is pleasant to read. Murphy weaves experiences from his own education and his life in the seminary in relevant ways, often producing a nod of recognition or assent.

The book does not really provide "close readings," although it does encourage them, and may in fact be the stimulus for some thorough rereadings of some of the poems. In this book, the poems tend to be discussed to the extent that they overlap with religious preoccupations and considerations—for some poems, the overlap is extensive, and for others, minimal. It is surprising that Murphy did not look at some of the poems in *Opus Posthumous*

that are more directly expressive of the ideas he espouses; "Presence of an External Master of Knowledge" and "A Child Asleep in Its Own Life" are some of Stevens' more directly metaphysical musings. However, it is true that Stevens might have rejected such poems for inclusion in *The Collected Poems* because he found them too obvious to be truly poetry, and that Murphy clearly wants the most powerful and memorable of the poems to serve as the basis for his religious interpretation of Stevens' work.

Stevens, who was concerned with the priesthood of the poet, would most likely be content to have his poems represented by an actual priest as the basis for Christian meditations and devotions, whether or not he affirmed all of Murphy's exegesis.

Janet McCann
Texas A&M University

Vassar Viewed Veraciously: 16 Pencil Sketches by Wallace Stevens.

Introduction and notes by D. H. Woodward. Iowa City: The Windhover Press, 1995.

This handsome limited edition reproduces a set of drawings Wallace Stevens made at Vassar College in 1931. It is a fine example of the bookmaker's art, precisely the sort of object that Stevens himself would have admired. The attractive cover is apparently fashioned of handmade rag paper in a warm terra-cotta color, with a soft, felt-like texture. The colophon states: "The text was printed letterpress, at The Windhover Press, from Romanée type on hand-made Bibliophile Society paper, and the drawings were printed at the Offset Workshop on Mohawk Superfine." It is a collector's item, and, at \$65, it is priced accordingly.

These sixteen pencil sketches may not be the only such drawings Stevens ever made, but they are the only ones extant. They survive, it seems, because the poet gave them to his wife, Elsie. She carefully kept them, adding a separate sheet with the handwritten title "Wallace's Drawings at Vassar College." Like the "June Books" that Stevens gave her in 1908 and 1909, these sketches must have had personal, sentimental value to her.

During the summer of 1931, Elsie and Holly attended the Institute of Euthenics at Vassar, which was, according to Daniel Woodward's introduction, "designed to promote the education of children within the home." Wallace apparently joined them on one or more weekends. It must have been a happy time. In later years, Elsie liked to recall that she had "gone to Vassar" and Wallace thought of Vassar as the ideal college for Holly (although, in the end, she had other ideas).

The campus obviously charmed Stevens. He drew its trees and open spaces; its architecture—Blodgett Hall of Euthenics, the dormitory where Elsie and Holly were staying, "The four ornaments of the façade of the chapel" [Stevens' title]; and three paintings from the Taylor Museum. Woodward's detailed notes are helpful in identifying these subjects and in deciphering Stevens' handwriting. The introduction judiciously notes that, although these are "amateur

exercises in drawing," nevertheless "there is much of Stevens in every sketch." There is, for instance, a grotesque flair that seems typically Stevensian in his sketch of "The One-Eyed Man Below E[lsie] V[iola] S[tevens]' Window" (depicting a garden statue—one of many brought back from Italy by Matthew Vassar—which has since disappeared). This sketch is appropriately used as a kind of logo on the title page. As Woodward also points out, Stevens' interest in modern art is evident in all these drawings: from his ironic humor in "Robbins on the Grass" (a mostly blank page with a few rapid pencil-marks on it) to his reduction of form to the barest geometrical notation in "Observatory and Lamp-Post." Even his study of an early Italian Renaissance painting shows his modernist sensibility, depicting its "dynamic configurations" rather than its surface detail.

This beautifully produced book provides a fascinating glimpse of Stevens enjoying a poet's holiday in the realm of the graphic arts, acting out literally and with rare good humor the analogy between literature and the visual arts that is so central to his poetry and poetic theory.

Glen MacLeod

University of Connecticut, Waterbury

**Wallace Stevens Society Program
1997 MLA in Toronto**

WALLACE STEVENS: EXCURSIONS AND MEDITATIONS

Monday, 29 December 1997

1:45–3:00 p.m., Territories, Royal York

Presiding: James S. Leonard, The Citadel

1. "Stevens's 'Noble Rider' and the History of Art," Glen G. MacLeod, Univ. of Connecticut, Waterbury
 2. "Stevens in Canada in Stevens," Mervyn E. Nicholson, Univ. College of the Cariboo
 3. "The (Un)Mixing of Genres in 'Credences of Summer,'" Malcolm Woodland, Univ. of Toronto, Saint George Campus
- Respondent: Eleanor Cook, Univ. of Toronto, Saint George Campus

News and Comments

From his yacht *Sendaya* deep in the Pacific, William Haxton writes: "For the past six years I have been on a small yacht in the Pacific, zigzagging across that majestic and mythical ocean from one pristine island to another. . . . It may surprise you to know that every now and then *The Wallace Stevens Journal* surfaces in some out of the way library on some remote island here in the Pacific. And in Kiribati of all places, there are three volumes of Mr. Stevens' works. Of course, for me, that's like finding buried treasure."

* * *

Stevens' Bowl, Cat and Broomstick was produced on July 15–16, 1997, probably for the first time since 1917. It was performed in New York City at HERE (Avenue of the Americas near Spring Street) as part of the American Living Room Festival. Produced by David F. Slone, directed by David Levine, dramaturged by Loren Noveck, and with original music composed by Harris J. Wulfson, it featured Winsome Brown, Adam Feldman, and Kathryn Benson. Responding to an inquiry from John N. Serio, director David Levine comments on the production:

It was actually a big success. Thank you for asking. People responded very well to it, and were generally amazed it could be staged at all. It wasn't well-publicized this time around, but now that I know how well it plays, I'd like to restage it in January/February, along with *Carlos among the Candles*, which would also be interesting on stage. (I just don't like *Three Travelers*.)

Directorially I was very proud of it, as it's a difficult play to stage effectively. The staging was vaguely *commedia dell'arte*, a little metaphysical puppet-box or fortune-teller's parlor. Two walls of deep purple taffeta receding in forced perspective, upstage a portal of black taffeta polka-dotted in purple. An oriental rug center stage. A bench upstage left on a diagonal. Footlights up on Broomstick, DSR [downstage right], performing some sort of alchemical experiment, painstakingly checking and rechecking equations he's chalked on the floor before combining two substances in a test-tube. Just when he's ready to pour, Bowl and Cat begin talking. He spills crystals everywhere. He tries to resume his experiments while carrying on this debate, but he finds Dupray's poetry so excruciating that the experiment explodes during Bowl's first recitation.

I won't go through the whole thing. I describe the opening to give you a sense of both how I treated the slapsticky edge of the play, and the degree to which one has to stage action *through* Stevens' play to convey the relationships between characters, where the argument is going, and who's winning at a given point. It was also important too that the play follow the rhythm of a real argument over ideas; points get rephrased, repeated, modified, without warning, without justification, often unfairly; there is

hardly ever a clearly defined turning point; status simply washes back and forth. Thus the transmigrations of the book were absolutely key to marking the development of the argument, as was the way it was handled (tenderly by Bowl, brusquely by Broomstick, lasciviously by Cat). We developed a sort of mimetic mania in Cat which led her to act out any poem she happened to overhear, and frequently to imitate the movements of whoever was talking at a given point—thus Cat developed her own set of movements and lower-order motivations (Bowl and Broomstick seem agreed that Cat's stance is primitive), and thus anyone's pontifications were always accompanied by a sort of half-mockery/half-tribute.

Which was appropriate to my take on the play. In production it shouldn't side with either. If it does you lose sympathy with one of the characters, and the dialectic is a lot more interesting if you don't know who's going to win. Bowl loses only because Bowl agrees to let historical data decide the debate. But Bowl's foolishness in falling for an implied author is still more romantic, and seems to make life more fun, than Broomstick's cynicism in insisting that poetry that poor must be the work of some old crone—even if he is right. This is one of the reasons I made Broomstick an alchemist (another is that the aesthetic of colored liquids in vials, this strange, toylike immanence, is a way of translating the elements I love in Stevens' poetry); strict obedience to a set of utterly rigorous rules and principles, which one believes are absolutely scientific, and which ultimately lead you nowhere. After Bowl's collapse and Cat's departure, Broomstick can once again carry out his alchemical experiments in peace. He delivers the punch line, sits down, picks up his vials, and—the thing blows up in his face again. Blackout.

If you have any ideas where this might be performed/performable, please let me know.

—David Levine, stinpilot@aol.com

* * *

Daniel Schnaidt, founder of the Hartford Friends of Wallace Stevens, announces the formation of a Wallace Stevens Listserv. This list has been established to serve as a forum for discussion about Wallace Stevens and his poetry and to provide a place for notification about events, publications, and items of interest to Stevens aficionados.

To subscribe send e-mail to: majordomo@wesleyan.edu. In the body of your message type: `subscribe wallace_stevens <user e-mail address>`

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* * *

The *Oxford English Dictionary* seeks our assistance in locating references to the word *firecat*. Sparked by Massimo Bacigalupo's article on "Wallace Stevens and the Firecat," which appeared in the previous issue, John N. Serio requested that the *OED* consider including the word *firecat* in its dictionary. Eleanor L. Rands, Senior Assistant Editor, responded quite favorably:

Although our current general criteria for inclusion in the *Oxford English Dictionary* include a requirement for five independent examples of use, we do accord privileged consideration to words which, while yielding less evidence, are used in widely read contexts, and *firecat* falls into this category. It is therefore highly likely that it will be included in the next edition of the *OED*. . . .

The definition of the term is obviously problematic, given the unresolved critical debate about its significance in the work of Wallace Stevens and Hart Crane and its absence from American regional and dialect dictionaries, not to mention the (presumably different, perhaps punning?) meaning attached to it by Cat Stevens [*Teaser and the Firecat*] which we will need to investigate further. I suspect that any dictionary entry will point out the uncertainty in the cases of Wallace Stevens and Crane by making reference to the critical literature, perhaps in particular to the article in *The Wallace Stevens Journal* which you have provided.

I hope that you find this information encouraging. Should the researches of the Wallace Stevens Society lead to the discovery of other uses of *firecat*, particularly any which pre-date its appearance in 'Earthy Anecdote', we would be very grateful to be kept informed.

If you know of any other published occurrences of the word *firecat*, please forward your information to Serio at Clarkson University. His e-mail address is: serio@polaris.clarkson.edu.

* * *

The Hartford Friends of Wallace Stevens and the Connecticut Center for the Book hosted the 2nd Annual Wallace Stevens Birthday Bash at the Hartford Public Library from 7:00 to 10:30 P.M. on Friday, October 3, 1997. The event featured John Hollander reading his own poetry and speaking on "Wallace Stevens and My Generation." The celebration included a drawing installation by Mary Barnes, entitled "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," and live music and refreshments, including cake and champagne. From 3:00 to 6:00 P.M., nearly two dozen luminaries of the Hartford cultural scene participated in a public reading on the steps of the library in "Hartford Remembers Wallace Stevens." Readers included the Presidents of Trinity College and the University of Hartford; the Directors of the Wadsworth Atheneum, the Hartford Stage Company, and the Mark Twain House; and Connecticut Poet Laureate Leo Connellan.

* * *

The Lannan Foundation, a nonprofit organization based in Los Angeles, has given its Poetry Garden, which features Stevens' poem "Anecdote of the Jar," to Beloit College in Beloit, Wisconsin. The Foundation was begun in 1960 by J. Patrick Lannan, a Chicago financier and collector. Two years ago, it decided to end its exhibitions program and it began to disperse its collection, with gifts already made to the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, and the Art Institute of Chicago. The walled garden was designed by Siah Armajani, who will redesign it for its new space, to be four times larger than its previous setting. The college will name the garden the "Beloit Poetry Garden" and will use it for readings. In addition, The Lannan Foundation continues to support the publication of *The Wallace Stevens Journal* with an annual grant of \$2000.

* * *

Bart Eeckhout, of the University of Ghent, Belgium, writes that over the past several years he has been translating Stevens' poems into Dutch and that these translations have been published in various literary journals. He is currently at work on an annotated bilingual volume of Stevens' translations into Dutch, which will be published by Atlas, a literary publisher in Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

* * *

The University of Connecticut's 35th annual Wallace Stevens Poetry Program, sponsored as always by the Hartford Insurance Co., will feature Donald Hall as the WS poet. He will read his own poetry and present awards to winners of the student poetry contest on two consecutive evenings: Wednesday, April 8, 1998, at 8:00 P.M., at the University of Connecticut, Storrs; and Thursday, April 9, 1998, at 8:00 P.M., at the Hartford's corporate headquarters in Hartford. Both events are open to the public, free of charge.

* * *

The Unterberg Poetry Center of the 92nd Street YMHA in New York City sponsored "The Poetry of Wallace Stevens" on Monday, November 3, at 8:00 P.M. Speakers were Harold Bloom, John Hollander, Anne Lauterbach, Joan Richardson, Mark Strand, and J. D. McClatchy.

* * *

On Friday, March 6, 1998, Quinnipiac College, Hamden, Connecticut, will host a symposium entitled "Parallel Portraits of Charles Ives and Wallace Stevens." The program will include a panel discussion with, among others, Vivian Perlis, author of an oral biography of Ives. In addition, there will be a performance of five or six Ives songs by singer Jane Bryden; Ned Rorem's *Last Poems of Wallace Stevens*, featuring Jane Bryden, Harry Clark, cello, and Sandra Schulman, piano; and a reading of WS poems. The performance, but not the panel, will be repeated on Saturday, March 7th, at the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford.

* * *

The Hartford Friends of Wallace Stevens will be joining with the Friends of Elizabeth Park in sponsoring a reading of Stevens' poetry—probably by a local poet—in Elizabeth Park during Rose Weekend, the third weekend of June, 1998. The Friends of Elizabeth Park have been in existence for twenty years; they are devoted to maintaining and improving the Park's gardens, especially the Rose Garden. Rose Weekend has been held annually in the park since the late 19th century, so Stevens himself would have been familiar with it.

* * *

Zhaoming Qian has graciously given to the Huntington Library a set of four slides for the WS Collection. The slides depict two paintings owned by Stevens: the "Bird-and-Flower" scroll, given by Peter Lee, and a painting entitled "Morning Glory."

* * *

Wallace Stevens titles continue to command high interest among book collectors, confirmed by a sampling of the past year's offerings. In the January 18, 1997, catalog of the William Reese Company, three items were offered: the first trade edition of *Ideas of Order* (1936) at \$350, the first edition of *Parts of a World* (1942) at \$250, and uncorrected galley proofs of the 1966 Knopf edition of the *Letters of Wallace Stevens* for \$300.

* * *

Among the various WS researchers to come through the halls of the Huntington was Don Blount, who is preparing an edition of the letters between Wallace and Elsie Stevens, to be co-published by the Huntington.

Sara S. Hodson
The Huntington Library

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