

Cubist Poetics: Wallace Stevens and Painting

Scott Pound

Commenting on his own work and that of his contemporaries in the teens and early twenties, William Carlos Williams said "I think it was the French painters rather than the writers who influenced us and their influence was great. They created an atmosphere of release, color release, release from stereotyped forms, trite subjects" (qtd. in Buttel 154). Stereotyped forms, trite subjects; chiaroscuro, sentimentality? With regard to the development of the American avant-garde in poetry, it would seem that the painters, to paraphrase what Freud said about "the writers," were there first. Stevens likewise trumpeted the French influence and its usefulness as a tool for reorienting art. "There seems to exist a corpus of remarks in respect to painting," writes Stevens, "which are as significant to poets as they are to painters."¹ Indeed, the influence of painting on Stevens and his contemporaries has never really been questioned. But how are we to discuss Stevens' own peculiar and complex relation to painting?

I shall argue here that Stevens' appropriation of an avant-garde aesthetics, particularly that of cubism, provided him with the means to enact an important shift from aesthetic product to aesthetic process, from a poetics in which the representation of meaning is the ultimate end to one in which the goal seems, instead, to represent the ways in which meaning itself unfolds.

Lucy and the Jar

Let us begin by taking two poems—two short lyrics—which at first glance will appear to have nothing to do at all with painting: Wordsworth's "A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal"² and Stevens' "Anecdote of the Jar."³ The two poems are suggestive of one another, in meter, if not also in subject matter. One could even argue that Stevens' poem owes a debt to

¹ *The Necessary Angel*, New York: Vintage, 1942, 160. Hereafter cited as NA.

² *In William Wordsworth*, [Oxford Authors Series] Ed. Stephen Gill, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1984, 147. Hereafter cited as WW.

³ *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens*, New York: Vintage, 1990, 76. Hereafter cited as CP.

Wordsworth's. "A Slumber" is one of a group of poems known as the "Lucy Poems" in which the poet meditates on the death of a young woman. Who she is and how she died we do not know. Scholarly attempts to affix an identity to Lucy outside the context of the poems have not been successful. In the case of Stevens' poem, there is little to suggest that it is explicitly about death, let alone the death of a young woman. It begins with the obscure line, "I placed a jar in Tennessee." However, the jar is "gray and bare" and has been placed "upon a hill." The jar resembles a tombstone in every respect except that it is a jar. The jar exudes a deathly eminence: "It did not give of bird or bush, / Like nothing else in Tennessee." Where is this leading us?

In May, 1919, a few months before "Anecdote of the Jar" was written, Stevens' sister Catherine fell ill and died suddenly while serving with the Red Cross in France. Stevens' letters indicate that he had spent the month of April and part of May, 1918, in Tennessee on business.⁴ The connections here are admittedly sketchy and circumstantial, but they are enough to arouse one's interest. My purpose in juxtaposing these two poems, however, is not to posit a scholarly connection based on influence, but rather to ask, in the first place: What would it mean to contrast (rather than simply compare) Stevens with the poetics of romanticism to which he has been so often associated? In other words, how are we to read Stevens' work once the surrogate poetics of romanticism is suspended?⁵ And more specifically, to forecast the central concern of this essay, What is the relationship between

⁴ *Letters of Wallace Stevens*, Ed. Holly Stevens, New York: Knopf, 1966, 206-209. Hereafter cited as L. The first mention of "Anecdote of the Jar" in Stevens' letters is in a letter addressed to Harriet Monroe and dated August 16, 1919 (214).

⁵ The two critics most insistent on Stevens' debt to the romantics, not to mention two of the most widely read and influential critics of Stevens, have been Harold Bloom and Helen Vendler. An introductory aim of this essay is to demonstrate that the neo-romantic reading of Stevens, in order for it to maintain its coherence, must suppress certain aspects of the influence that surrounded Stevens while he was writing, namely: the influence of the avant-garde. For example, immediately after quoting Stevens' forward-looking avant-garde dictum "All poetry is experimental poetry," Vendler robs the statement of its force by adding the following: "If each poem is a new experiment, the ground on which it experiments is the past, both the past of the genre and the past of the *oeuvre*" (4). Bloom similarly steers Stevens away from anything that hints of an avant-garde influence: "French colorings in Stevens, in *Harmonium* and after, invariably are evasions of more embarrassing obligations to Anglo-American literary tradition," writes Bloom (51). Incidentally, Vendler reads "Anecdote of the Jar" as "a commentary on Keats' 'Ode on a Grecian Urn.'" Bloom, in *The Poems of Our Climate*, does not discuss the poem.

Stevens' early work and the poetics that was at least as important to him as romanticism: the poetics of painting?⁶

The painterly influence on Stevens can be read two ways⁷: as an effect of Stevens' involvement in the art world and his palpable delight in color and variegated natural forms, or less tangibly, as a preoccupation—not so much of Stevens himself than of the actual poems—with the devices and processes of their own production, an orientation analogous to what Clement Greenberg canonizes as the procedural basis of avant-garde painting: "the expressive resources of the medium" (303). To separate Stevens the art enthusiast from Stevens the poet would seem to contradict the purpose. To have been influenced means, after all, to have been interested, but too often in the case of Stevens a discussion of his association with the Arensberg circle and his later activities as a collector takes the place of a discussion of the poems.⁸ I wish to avoid that here. Moreover, a literal comparison between Stevens' poetry and painting as such, while it may yield certain parallels with impressionism (insights which are themselves impressionistic) and others with cubism, does not tell us much about how the poems actually work as poems. This is because Stevens' relation to painting, as his essay "The Relations Between Poetry and Painting" attests, was essentially theoretical. It allowed him to shift the emphasis of poetry from referential value to compositional value, from a notion of poetic medium as transparent to a realization of poetic medium as opaque.

A closer look at the two poems⁹ already cited will help to demonstrate this. The poems, in fact, have a great deal more in common than they seem

⁶ This will seem to be an odd formulation. That Stevens must have had such a thing in mind, however, is clear from the statement in his essay "The Relations Between Poetry and Painting," that "this [the relationship] is simply the analogy between two different forms of poetry. It might be better to say that it is the identity of poetry revealed as between poetry in words and poetry in paint" (OP 159).

⁷ Several essays, and one full length study (see Macleod below), have been devoted to Stevens' relation to painting. However, most of them begin where *Harmonium* ends and as such have been of little direct use to me here. Worth noting, however, are: Bonnie Costello's "The Effects of Analogy: Wallace Stevens and Painting," Michel Benamou's "Wallace Stevens: Some Relations Between Poetry and Painting," and Charles Altieri's "Why Stevens Must Be Abstract." Please see Works Cited list for complete citations.

⁸ See Glen MacLeod, *Wallace Stevens and Modern Art: From the Armory Show to Abstract Expressionism*, New Haven: Yale UP, 1993, particularly the chapter on *Harmonium*.

⁹ The full text to both poems appears in an Appendix to this essay.

Pound

to at first glance. "Anecdote of the Jar" begins and ends in regular iambic tetrameter lines, with the meter breaking down slightly in the middle lines. "A Slumber" is written in alternating iambic tetrameter and trimeter lines. Both poems make initial reference to the speaker before quickly turning the focus away from the speaker and onto the object; in Stevens' case, the jar; in Wordsworth's 'she' (Lucy). Both Lucy and the jar have a certain autonomy, even sovereignty, with respect to nature:

Wordsworth: She seemed a thing that could not feel
 The touch of earthly years (WW 147).

Stevens: The jar was round upon the ground
 And tall and of a port in air.
 It took dominion everywhere (CP 76).

In the same way that Lucy was once a subject but is now an object because she is dead, the jar was presumably once a functional object but is now a dead object for being separated from that function. Both have been robbed of their fecundity, the jar no longer serving to contain anything inside of itself; Lucy dead before her life had much content, before she could conceive.¹⁰ But here the similarities between the two poems end.

Whereas in Stevens' poem the jar triumphs over nature, taming the "slovenly wilderness," in Wordsworth's poem, nature takes its co(u)rse (i.e. corpse)¹¹: Lucy is "rolled round in earth's diurnal course / With rocks and stones and trees." As tragic as Lucy's death is for the speaker, it is nonetheless natural. Far from disrupting anything, Lucy's dying confirms nature's course. Her death marks the completion of a circle in which she herself is "rolled round" with the rest of nature. The governing metaphor of the poem is also the prime mover behind its consequences. It is the cyclical course of nature which both steals Lucy and explains her disappearance. As such the poem calls no attention to itself. The rhythm is appropriate to a dirge, and the logic has a coherence and plausibility that any Christian would recognize. The poem exists to explain—or if not explain, at least account for—its referent, the death of a young woman. The ultimate value in the poem is referential (referring as it does to Lucy's state) and evocative (insofar as it seems to want to treat Lucy's state as edifying). The poem's

¹¹ 'course' being a homonym for the archaic form of the word 'corpse'.

composition, in the choice of the metaphor it employs, is designed to conceal the fact that it is a construct.

Compare this to the compositional status of Stevens' poem. The poem appears almost as if it were designed to stump the reader, and to a certain degree, as I hope to demonstrate, it is. The title alone throws the reader into ambiguity¹²: Is an "anecdote of the jar" an anecdote told *about* a jar or *by* a jar? Is there an anecdote here at all? One has a hard time picturing Stevens relating this to his colleagues in the insurance business. The poem frustrates any attempt to discern its logic as referring to something that could have happened. Why would anyone "place a jar in Tennessee," and then go on to make this gesture the basis of an anecdote? In what sense can a jar be said to tame the "slovenly wilderness"? And so on.

It helps, perhaps, to think of this in terms of cubist principles. In attempting to shatter the illusion of transparent medium in which all elements of composition cohere with one another so as not to call attention to themselves (the case in Wordsworth's poem), the cubists revelled in contradiction and inconsistency, placing everything from the images of musical instruments to text to wallpaper on the same plane, producing a *mélange* of contradictory clues which are impossible to reconcile with one another. Stevens seems to be doing much the same thing when he places, of all things, a 'jar,' in, of all places, 'Tennessee' and calls the gesture, not an act of confusion or an attempt to calculate the amount of rainfall in a given period, but an 'anecdote.'

In attempting to make more sense of "Anecdote of the Jar," we might also adapt Stevens' own words from the essay on poetry and painting. Speaking, ironically enough, of a line by Wordsworth (and using it, I might add, in a sense opposed to my use of Wordsworth above) Stevens writes: "[The] referential importance is slight, for the importance of the action to which they [the words] refer is not in the action itself, but in the meaning; and that meaning is born by the words" (NA 163). For Stevens to call his poem an anecdote, then, is a bit of a tease. Anecdotes refer to everyday action; this poem does not. Where is the meaning in an anecdote that does not refer to anything? For an answer we need only repeat the question.

¹² We know from Stevens' letters that ambiguity was a definite function in his process of creating poems. As he writes to R.P. Blackmur, "One of the essentials of poetry is ambiguity. I don't feel that I have touched the thing that I have touched it in ambiguous form" (qtd. in MacLeod 22).

Pound

We need not look for it. It is, as Stevens says, "born by the words," which is to say that the meaning *originates* and *is carried* by the words themselves and is not invested in the referential value that words carry with respect to the world. The meaning of Stevens' poem is that it exists.

But what if we were to complete our comparison, operating on the dubious assumption that Stevens did write this poem about the death of his sister? The jar is an empty vessel whose grayness and bareness "take dominion everywhere," whose stark motionlessness relieves the surroundings of all claim to life. Should this poem be called "Anecdote of a Grieving Brother"?

I do not think so. That would confine it to one meaning alone, and it is the nature of the poem, like it is the nature of the cubist painting, to harbor a multiplicity of possible meanings. And yet, the poem is so plain. It seems to involve no elaborate metaphors. It is not bursting at the seams, like cubist paintings often are, with elements in perpetual discord with one another. There are occasional diversions from conventional syntax—from the straightforwardness of "I placed a jar" to the awkward double negative of "It did not give of bird or bush, / Like nothing else in Tennessee"—but they certainly do not give as much pause as a violin splayed into a hundred triangular pieces upon a canvas. Marjorie Perloff, speaking of Rimbaud, sums up this strange effect better than I can when she says, "multiplicity of meaning gives way to a strange new literalism" (56).

The disjunctive syntax of cubist painting finds its way into Stevens' poetry not so much at the level of the image, although certain poems in *Harmonium* could be read that way¹³, but more so in terms of the logic of representation itself. The disruption in Stevens' poems occurs off the canvas, so to speak. Stevens replaces the verbal icon with something that, on the surface, is much less fantastic, but which, in its implications, greatly exceeds the singular efficacy of the icon. To be sure, the jar is the antithesis of an icon, even though it is ironically given iconic status, placed as it is on top of a hill in domination of its surroundings. How, then, does the jar signify?

In a way that is closer to the structure of allegory than it is to that of the symbol. The jar, its qualities, and its effect on the surroundings serve to illustrate, not, as we have already noted, something outside the poem, but rather the abstract significance of the poem itself. The poem, then, is an allegory, not of some outside reality, but of its own activity. In other words,

¹³ Cf. "The Public Square," (CP 108).

what Stevens does to the jar, he does to the form of the anecdote. In the same way he empties the jar of its contents (at least we presume it is an empty jar), Stevens also empties the form of the anecdote (not to mention our expectations of what a poem should do) of its conventional significance. Similarly, like the displaced jar, the empty anecdote dominates its surroundings. The question of how and why the poem could be called an anecdote "takes dominion" in any attempt to fathom the meaning of the poem. Perhaps a better title for the poem would be "Anecdote of the Anecdote."

Let us consider one last way of looking at "Anecdote of the Jar." The poem could be read, accurately I think, as an attempt at pure poetry, as a laying bare of the metaphor of the anecdote—the anecdote being, in a sense, the model of bourgeois art in its function as instruction and entertainment. Every anecdote has two essential elements. It must, in some way, communicate a story, usually one of the speaker's or someone else's discovery of some minor truth, and it must be an entertaining story. To push such an interpretation to the limit would be to claim that the poem, in calling itself an anecdote but failing to instruct or delight, upsets the whole notion of bourgeois art. As such the poem inhabits its own space unencumbered by ideology, sentimentality, allusion, or history. It refers only to itself.

The Anxiety of Reference

Not so Stevens. In life, Stevens promulgated an image of himself that was so devoid of content as to rival the enigma of his poetry. "My autobiography is, necessarily, very brief," Stevens wrote to Harriet Monroe in 1914, adding, incorrectly, "for I have published nothing" (L 182). Presumably Monroe did not settle for this, for in the next letter to her we find the following beleaguered account of the poet's life: "I was born in Reading, Pennsylvania, am thirty-five years old, a lawyer, reside in New York City and have published no books" (L 183). Trivial as this may seem, it has interesting implications for our reading of Stevens' poetry. An anxiety of reference seems to have operated in Stevens' private and poetic life. But whereas Stevens may not have talked about himself much, his poems make reference to their own existence with unfailing regularity. And whereas Stevens deflected inquiries as to his life onto the level of banal fact—place of birth/residence, age, occupation—his seemingly most obscure poems tend toward the opposite. That is, they tend to be the most immediate because they describe nothing other than their own process.

Pound

"Metaphors of a Magnifico" (CP 19) is a poem about the composition of a poem. To read it as anything more than an elliptical meditation on its own attempt to become a poem doesn't make much sense. Its subject—twenty men crossing a bridge into a village—is simply given. Within this larger frame of the poem, however, is another poem, the actual subject of which has nothing to do with the twenty men; the concern of this sub-poem is how the idea of twenty men crossing a bridge can be made into a poem. To this end, the poem appears to have two goals: to give its premise meaning and to make it sing. Meaning arrives mid-way through the poem, but the song never materializes.

Although not phrased in the interrogative, the first stanza is essentially a question about how a poem could take shape out of the singular premise of twenty men crossing a bridge into a village:

[Are] twenty men crossing a bridge,
Into a village,
[...] twenty men crossing twenty bridges,
Into twenty villages,
Or one man
Crossing a single bridge into a village[?]

inquires the poem. The next two lines are in the form of a self-conscious monologue. "This is old song / That will not declare itself [...]" The song may not be willing to declare itself, but the poem continues along the same track, with the tone of the poem itself assuming, as if in defiance of the elusive song, a declarative tone:

Twenty men crossing a bridge,
Into a village,
Are
Twenty men crossing a bridge
Into a village.

The word 'Are' is given a line to itself with the emphasis falling squarely upon it, but despite the change in tone to the declarative, the song has still not declared itself: "That [presumably the song] will [still] not declare itself / Yet is certain as meaning [...]" Half way through the poem's 23 lines, the poem that this poem is trying to turn itself into has not yet materialized, even though it "is certain as meaning." But the poem moves on apace and with apparent certainty,

The boots of the men clump
On the boards of the bridge.
The first white wall of the village
Rises through fruit trees
only to lose itself again:
Of what was it I was thinking?
So the meaning escapes.
Finally, after two more feeble attempts to resume the poem,
The first white walls of the village [...]
The fruit-trees [...]

it falters completely and dies. Was there ever a poem here? What do you call a poem that ends before it has begun? We could call it a non-poem, a failed poem, a poem in search of a song, but does it mean anything?

Clement Greenberg defined the history of avant-garde painting as "that of a progressive surrender to the resistance of its medium" (307) which is a very good way of describing what happens in many of Stevens' early poems. If the medium of poetry is ultimately "song," as the poem implies, and it is precisely the song that refuses to declare itself, then what else can we call this poem except a surrender to the resistance of its own medium. The poem is an outright failure, and self-consciously so. I would even go so far as to argue that the only meaning the poem is capable of generating depends on it being recognized as a failed poem. So the question becomes: Why does the poem not succeed?

The poem does not succeed first of all because it is predicated on something other than itself, the logistical, perspectival problem "[Are] twenty men crossing a bridge, / Into a village./ [...] twenty men crossing twenty bridges, / Into twenty villages, / Or one man / Crossing a single bridge into a village[?]" ; secondly, the poem fails because it manages to find a single answer to the question it poses: "Twenty men crossing a bridge, / Into a village, / *Are* / Twenty men crossing a bridge / Into a village" [emphasis added]. Hence the meaning that the poem thinks it grasps in reducing the question to a solid answer proves false because once the possibilities inherent in the opening stanza are suppressed, the poem has no reason for being and therefore cannot be. The poem and the poem within the poem are

in fact two distinct poems: one actual, the other virtual. The actual poem on the page is the husk of an attempt to create another (virtual) poem that never came into being. The resultant meaning is not a property of either the actual or the virtual poem taken in isolation. That the poem can mean anything at all is the result of the interaction between these two elements.

The dialectic between the actual and the virtual poem implies two things: that the virtual poem—the poem that would have been a singularly meaningful, univocal utterance—cannot be written, or, short of that, is not worth writing; and secondly, to refer back to what we noted as the two goals of the poem (to mean and to sing), that meaning (i.e. univocal meaning of the sort that is arrived at in the second stanza) is an impediment to song, to poetry. Meaning of this latter univocal sort is beholden to logic, which in "Metaphors of a Magnifico" is the most blatant logic of all: pure tautology ("Twenty men crossing a bridge, / Into a village, / Are / Twenty men crossing a bridge / Into a village"). A tautology is the antithesis to poetry. It takes the form of a metaphor but does not offer a substitute for reality. Next to the form of metaphor (a is b), the form of tautology (a is a) is a bland and singularly uninteresting device. The poem that does not substitute something for reality, that does not posit some distance between the world and its fictive other within which the free play of signification is free to grow exponentially, is as redundant a creation as a tautology.

So, to the reductive Stevens of first things ("Above the forest of the parakeets, / A parakeet of parakeets prevails" [CP 82] and "There is a substance in us that prevails" [CP 15]), we must add the Stevens, not of last things, but of a reality that is multiple, variable, and relative. It is no mistake that this poem is called

Theory

I am what is around me.

Women understand this.

One is not a duchess

A hundred yards from a carriage.

These, then are portraits:

A black vestibule;

A high bed sheltered by curtains.

These are merely instances. (CP 86-7)

Poems From Nowhere

We are approaching an explanation of the common problem, held by many of Stevens readers in one form or another, that his poems somehow "were written from nowhere" (Filreis 254). With no obvious basis in human sentiment, politics, tradition, or even painting really, Stevens' poems appear groundless. More to the point, if the poet himself is not present in his poems, like the romantics so emphatically were, then where does the poem come from? It comes from nowhere, unless, of course, you are Harold Bloom or Helen Vendler, in which case it comes from romanticism.

Herein lies a central point: why Stevens is not a romantic. The romantic myth of a marriage between subject and object, mind and nature was never really enacted in the poems. Rather what one most of ten finds in romantic poetry is the one inscribed as the other—the mind as nature, nature as Geist. It is no great insight that, for the romantics, nature most often functioned as a mirror in which the subjectivity of the poet was reflected. In purporting to refer to nature the romantics were in fact creating an allegorical self-representation of the grandest proportions. In short, the romantic poem tended to be about the romantic poet.¹⁴

Not until the Symbolists is the subject-object dualism regarded in full sobriety as reflected in Rimbaud's phrase: *je est un autre*. Despite all Stevens' proselytizing about the imagination and reality in the essays and aphorisms, the epistemological framework of his poetry points to Rimbaud more so than to Keats or Wordsworth. The 'I' of Stevens' poetry is never the isolated mind in contemplation of the outside world. More often in Stevens the 'I' stands for the other that is language, the process of figuration itself. "It is with strange malice," writes Stevens in the opening lines of "The Weeping Burgher," (CP 61) "that I distort the world." What is 'I'? The 'I' that distorts the world is not the poet so much as it is the poem for it is the property of poetry and the figurative potential of language itself that actually carries out the displacement from the subjectivity of the poet to the outside world, such that, as Stevens writes in the same poem, "ill humors / Should mask as white girls" (CP61). To say that the mask of the poet is the poem could equally stand as a description of the romantics, and of Stevens. What separates

¹⁴ Even Keats, who abhorred this quality in Wordsworth so much that he gave it a name ("the egotistical sublime") and developed an antidote ("negative capability"), could not help falling back on the self. As in "Ode to a Nightingale," the poet's flight from subjectivity always returns to a morbid confrontation with the earth-bound self.

Stevens from the romantics irreconcilably, however, is the way that his poems so often peel back the mask, not to reveal what is underneath, but rather to show, first of all, that the poem is indeed a mask, a performance, a construct, and secondly that there is nothing but the mask to speak of.

The Effects of Analogy

In venturing to draw an analogy between poetry and painting Stevens is not attempting, like earlier proponents of the analogy, to shore up the mimetic potential of the written word, to increase the representational efficacy of language by associating it with the pictoriality of painting. His aim is, in fact, the opposite. For Stevens, painting, particularly avant-garde painting, was acting on principles that had not yet been realized in writing. Far from giving us "a selected truth, raised above all that is local and accidental, purged of all that is abnormal and eccentric, so as to be in the highest sense representation" (Babbitt 9-10), the painters Stevens admired were trading representational values in for compositional ones. The locality of medium and the accidents of composition in all its abnormality and eccentricity became part of the art work. In the final analysis, the obscurity of Stevens which so many readers have found an obstacle becomes legible. It means simply that Stevens' is not a poetry that attempts to translate experience into words, but rather one in which words translate into experience.

Works Cited

- Altieri, Charles. "Why Stevens Must Be Abstract." *Painterly Abstraction in Modernist American Poetry*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1989.
- Babbitt, Irving. *The New Laokoon: An Essay on the Confusion of the Arts*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1910.
- Benamou, Michel. "Wallace Stevens: Some Relations Between Poetry and Painting." *Comparative Literature* 11 (1959): 47-60.
- Bloom, Harold. *Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1976.
- Buttel, Robert. *Wallace Stevens: The Making of Harmonium*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1967.
- Costello, Bonnie. "Effects of Analogy: Wallace Stevens and Painting." *Wallace Stevens: The Poetics of Modernism*. Ed. Albert Gelpi. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985.
- Filreis, Alan. "'Beyond the Rhetoricians Touch': Stevens' Painterly Abstractions." *American Literary History* 4.2 (1992): 230-63.
- Greenberg, Clement. "Towards a Newer Laokoon." *Partisan Review* 7 (1940): 296-310.
- MacLeod, Glen. *Wallace Stevens and Modern Art: From the Armory Show to Abstract Expressionism*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1993.
- Perloff, Marjorie. *The Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1981.
- Stevens, Wallace. *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens*. New York: Vintage, 1990.
- . *Letters of Wallace Stevens*. Ed. Holly Stevens. New York: Knopf, 1966.
- . *The Necessary Angel*. New York: Vintage, 1942.
- . *Opus Posthumous*. Ed. Milton J. Bates. Rev. ed. New York: Vintage, 1989.
- Vendler, Helen. *Wallace Stevens: Words Chosen out of Desire*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1986.

Pound

Appendix

A slumber did my spirit seal

A slumber did my spirit seal;
I had no human fears:
She seemed a thing that could not feel
The touch of earthly years.

No movement has she now, no force;
She neither hears nor sees,
Rolled round in earth's diurnal course
With rocks and stones and trees.

Anecdote of the Jar

I placed a jar in Tennessee,
And round it was, upon a hill.
It made the slovenly wilderness
Surround that hill.

The wilderness rose up to it,
And sprawled around, no longer wild.
The jar was round upon the ground
And tall and of a port in air.

It took dominion everywhere.
The jar was gray and bare.
It did not give of bird or bush,
Like nothing else in Tennessee.