

Wallace Stevens, Heidegger, and the “Virile Hölderlin”: Poetry and Philosophy and The Travelogue of the Mind

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Everything is rhythm, the entire destiny of man is one heavenly rhythm, just as every work of art is one rhythm, and everything swings from the poetizing lips of the god.¹

The 20th of March 2020 was the 250th anniversary of the Suabian poet, Friedrich Hölderlin (20 March 1770, Lauffen am Neckar, to 7 June 1843, Tübingen). In the world of arts and letters, anniversaries such as these are highly contested affairs: important festivals are organized to which only the “right” personages are invited to speak. The crisis of Covid-19, quite ongoing, changed all that. But in truth, even without a crisis change there would have been. The cast of those who might have been considered the right personages always changes, suggesting that possibilities shift and that margins have been “pushed,” borders extending to new and younger experts. To be sure, one can also come up short as this may be one way to read complaints about lost value, as Adorno and Horkheimer muse with respect to the commodity character of art (and festivals are designed to exemplify the character of “art as a consumer good”) in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* reflections on Beethoven “improvising ‘Rage for a Lost Penny’.”² Another kind of loss, not unrelated, is repeated in Heidegger’s “On the Way to Language,”³ which Heidegger retrains, over and over again, from Stefan George’s 1919 poem, *The Word*,

Where word breaks off, no thing may be.⁴

In a game of naughts, the silence imposed on alternate voices, those are the ignored, the disregarded, the unnoted, vies with all the other silences in the emptiness of vanity, incomprehension, inattention.

In what follows I will be talking about philosophy and poetry, and although I have already referred to the German poets, Hölderlin and George, I will be reading an American poet who was for his part keen on Heidegger, *keen* being the best word here, Wallace Stevens. By beginning with a reflection on Stevens’s epithet for

¹ Giorgio Agamben on Archilochus, via Bettina von Arnim on Hölderlin.

² L.v. Beethoven, *Die Wut über den verlorenen Groschen, ausgetobt in einer Caprice*; M. Horkheimer and T. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. E. Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2002) p. 127.

³ M. Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (Pfullingen: Günther Neske, 1959).

⁴ M. Heidegger, *On the Way to Language* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), p. 60.

Hölderlin as “virile” in his 1943 Mount Holyoke lecture, “The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet,”⁵ I seek to foreground a question that typically remains unmarked, swept, as it is in the assumption of the masculinity of the voice, under the rug of conventionalities supposedly fallen from favour but of course still with us.

For this reason, we still say: All men are created equal. The cliché force of this matters where civil rights are currently compromised with sometimes fatal force, for the public health. The focus on men is explicated by scholars as innocuous, as always already having referred to or included both men *and* women. To be sure, the Greeks from whom we take our notions of both rationality and liberty were clear that this applied to men, not to women, and at that: only to some kinds (citizens) of men at that, often limited to those born to propertied classes, as opposed to others. Like Anaxagoras, Socrates had friends with benefits, meaning power or wealth in the case of Pericles (Anaxagoras) or Plato (Socrates).

When we talk of philosophy, the “love of wisdom,” the ideal friendship of those dedicated to ideas as such, to beauty, to goodness, to truth, we are describing an ideal community of friends. Women, we know, though it took a Jacques Derrida to spell this out, do not count in this collectivity. Thus speaking of the politics of friendship, as the politics of *philia*, one of the rare places that Derrida invokes, without naming her by name, Simone de Beauvoir:

What relation does this domination maintain with the double exclusion we see at work in all great ethico-political philosophical discourses on friendship: on the one hand, the exclusion of friendship between women; on the other, the exclusion between a man and a woman? This double exclusion of the feminine in this philosophical paradigm would then confer on friendship the essential and essentially sublime figure of virile homosexuality.⁶

Derrida need not name Beauvoir: these ideas are henceforth to be read through his lens only; to mention her name would shift the game. And philosophy stands out among the fields of scholarship associated with the social sciences, like psychology, economic, sociology, in that philosophy is chary of citing other research, writing as if one had just now, this very minute, thought of everything.⁷

No footnotes please, we’re doing original philosophy.

⁵ W. Stevens, “The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet,” *The Sewanee Review* 52 (1944): 508-529.

⁶ J. Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship* (London: Verso, 1997), p. 279.

⁷ See for further references, B. Babich, “Good for Nothing: On Philosophy and Its Discontents,” in D. Bubbio and J. Malpas (eds.), *Why Philosophy?* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019), pp. 123-150.

By not mentioning Beauvoir, Derrida does what serried waves/generations of feminist scholars have also done in their turn. The tactic of non-mention may be especially developed in philosophy but it is as old as scholarship, advanced, going back to Aristotle and Plato, and taken up over the years as no one less than Newton writes in order as it seems to justify forgetting both of them under the guise of a (higher) dedication to truth: *Amicus Plato amicus Aristotelis sed magis amica veritas*.⁸ Duly bracketing Derrida, it recurs in Alexander Nehamas's *Friendship*,⁹ turning the reflection on friendship back to Montaigne.

Speaking of "Hölderlin as Virile Poet," Stevens was talking in a time of war and danger to an academic audience far removed from either and it is there that language can be most exciting. Thus Lawrence Kramer, writing on sexuality in Schubert reminds us, via Schiller, of Friedrich Welcker's complicated invocation of the "higher" love that is the love of what Friedrich Nietzsche will celebrate as the active and creative, masculine artist as opposed to the reactive, spectator's artist proper to the feminine aesthetic as such.¹⁰

Kramer reads Goethe's 1805 "Winckelmann and his Age" quite in the context of Weimar classicism. Kramer does not here mention though we might mention the beauty of Goethe's young friend, the astonishing lyric and dramatic poet and theorist of the aesthetic, no less, should we have needed more, Friedrich Schiller—but I, of course I say of course, as I seek to go beyond male desire as Kramer speaks of this, to consider male and female desire in *The Hallelujah Effect*.¹¹ By bringing up the difference between the male and the female, even Nietzsche foregrounds this contrast in his discussion of Goethe's *ewig weibliche*, in his Second *Untimely Meditation* "On the Use and Disadvantage [*Nachteil*] of History for Life," I call attention here to the physicality of the poet: Schiller was, as Hölderlin was, a beautiful man.

Let me take care to emphasize that this is my emphasis. It is not what Kramer himself was emphasizing. Kramer is concerned to work out what he names "the Ganymede complex," hence his reference to Friedrich Welcker and to Goethe and, specifically, to Schiller's "On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry."¹²

⁸ A.R. Hall, "Sir Isaac Newton's Note-Book, 1661-65," *Cambridge Historical Journal* 9 (1948): 239-250, at p. 242, n. 14.

⁹ A. Nehamas, *On Friendship* (New York: Basic Books, 2016).

¹⁰ L. Kramer, *Franz Schubert: Sexuality, Subjectivity, Song* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003).

¹¹ B. Babich, *The Hallelujah Effect: Music, Performance Practice, and Technology* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 49-78.

¹² Kramer, *Franz Schubert*, 116.

The beauty of the poet is a little beside the point for Kramer although the focus is homosexual desire, crucial for both Goethe who writes a poem, *Ganymed* (1774) and for Schiller, to be read—if I would extend the reference to Hölderlin via aether to be sure,¹³ in terms of the Goethean principle of “ascent”—as a vertical and as, Kramer argues, “virile” figure:

It appears as the awakening of virility in Ganymede’s character (familiarily conceived as the principle of action) and the discovery that virile love seeks a virile partner. The ascent thus replaces a supine receptivity with upward striving, the nightingale’s call of love with Ganymede’s own and the mother’s breast with the father’s.¹⁴

In his poetry, Hölderlin inclines such verticality, in a reflex as complicated as his rhythm. And, not unlike Milton’s pensive interruption of his own lyric line in his poem to his own higher esteemed friendship with a drowned colleague, his *Lycidas*:

But, O! the heavy change, now thou art gone,
Now thou art gone and never must return!

Hölderlin’s *Ganymed* thus closes with that turn, that change, and I first cite the German, the English will be given in turn,

Der Frühling kömmt. Und jedes, in seiner Art,
Blüht. Der ist aber ferne; nicht mehr dabei.
Irr ging er nun; denn allzugut sind
Genien; himmlisch Gespräch ist sein nun.

I have for a while been reflecting on Hölderlin’s ‘Father Aether!’¹⁵ and it matters that Heidegger cites just this final verse from Hölderlin’s *Ganymed* published as Heidegger notes “toward the end of 1804 ... with other poems ... “Dedicated to Love and Friendship.”¹⁶ Thus I repeat, in Will McNeill and Julia Ireland’s translation of Heidegger’s lecture course on Hölderlin’s *Mnemosyne*:

Spring is coming. And everything, in its own way,
Blossoms. But he is far away; no longer there.
He has gone astray; for all too good are

¹³ B. Babich, “Heidegger and Hölderlin on Aether and Life,” *Études phénoménologiques/Phenomenological Studies* 2 (2018): 111-133.

¹⁴ Kramer, *Franz Schubert*, 120.

¹⁵ See, again, Babich, “Heidegger and Hölderlin on Aether and Life”; and also B. Babich, *Words in Blood, Like Flowers: Philosophy and Poetry, Music and Eros in Hölderlin, Nietzsche, and Heidegger* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2007 [2006]).

¹⁶ M. Heidegger, *Hölderlin’s Hymn “Remembrance,”* trans. W. McNeill and J. Ireland (Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ. Press, 2018), p. 37.

Genii; heavenly talk is his now.¹⁷

Here, Heidegger emphasizes, more than most commentators, the language of *errancy*: wandering, madness, turns characteristic of Hölderlin in his own dark times.

Above, I noted Larry Kramer's romantic observation that "virile love seeks a virile partner" and it is with this that I turn to Wallace Stevens mindful as I do so that writing on poetry and criticism and in philosophy in general, thus the thematic of my own *Hallelujah Effect*, cannot but involve projection. This same projection is impossible to avoid when it comes to themes as close to (male) literary scholars and (male) poets on the theme Stevens invokes for his own part when he speaks of his "virile poet."

I above referred to Aristotle's justification of silencing exclusion (Newton took as his own, quite as Aristotle for his own part would take over Plato on his antecedents, including the poets), excused as side-effect, following a higher dedication to truth. Below, I will attempt to mark out a space for Stevens *and* philosophy, mindful, in an age of contestations, that to do so is also to transgress—I already named Heidegger—the analytic-continental divide from the side of the wrong personages, as the analytic-continental distinction maps onto the space of academic privilege where colleagues argue in sometimes in good, good faith, but sometimes in anger, that certain of their colleagues ought not be included. That excluding judgment on the part of philosophy extended to Stevens. How shall we read him?

The Aesthetics of Books: Edges and the Breaks of Space

As the poet and literary critic, Randall Jarrell emphasizes the contrast,¹⁸ as compared with poets neglected owing to obscurity, Wallace Stevens is anything but neglected and celebrated during his lifetime, still more after his death, his topics seem wonderfully accessible. How hard can it be to figure out a jar the poet places in Tennessee or else to count off the thirteen ways of looking at a black bird—*quâ* ways to live our lives as an NYU professor's, Joan Richardson, tells us, *How to Live, What to Do*,¹⁹ leaving a mere thirty seven ways, we cannot help but echo Paul Simon, to leave a lover.

¹⁷ Cited in Heidegger's *Hölderlin's Hymn, "Remembrance."*

¹⁸ See the beginning of Randall Jarrell's "The Obscurity of the Poet" in R. Jarrell, *Poetry and the Age* (Gainesville, FL: Univ. Press of Florida/Univ. of Florida Press, 2008), pp. 3-27.

¹⁹ Thus the title of Joan Richardson's *How to Live, What to Do: Thirteen Ways of Looking at Wallace Stevens* (Iowa City, IA: Univ. of Iowa Press, 2018).

If the later Stevens wrote about philosophy and poetry, giving a high-minded lecture four years before his death, at the University of Chicago, *A Collect of Philosophy*,²⁰ there has been no shortage of philosophers writing on Stevens. In my office library (fairly untouched for three decades), I have Thomas J. Hines's 1976 *The Later Poetry of Wallace Stevens: Phenomenological Parallels with Husserl and Heidegger*.²¹ These days there are a number of books on Stevens and philosophy, including one that could have been better, had the author brought Nietzsche, or even Heidegger to bear on his own reading of Stevens and the Presocratics.²² And there is Sebastian Gardner, "Wallace Stevens and Metaphysics: The Plain Sense of Things,"²³ and, with a book like a comet, *Things Merely Are*, by Simon Critchley,²⁴ not really, it was presaged by an article a decade earlier, Critchley's "The Philosophical Significance of a Poem (On Wallace Stevens)."²⁵ Still, of Critchley's book the literary scholar, Charles Altieri noted—and as there is even less of a shortage of literary readings of Stevens this is significant—that Critchley's work would like as not be "influential."²⁶

Influential.

Harold Bloom advances his own study of Stevens distinguished by self-sufficiency. Stepping beyond the frame, Frank Kermode supposes Stevens to have been captivated by the "virile Hölderlin" and not less by Heidegger, whom he calls, thinking of his moustache, the "old tramp," but otherwise innocent of Heidegger?²⁷ Kermode wants to talk philosophy thereby—if the publication of the Black

²⁰ W. Stevens, "A Collect of Philosophy," in W. Stevens, *Opus Posthumous* (2nd edn., New York: Vintage, 1990), pp. 267-280.

²¹ T.J. Hines, *The Later Poetry of Wallace Stevens: Phenomenological Parallels with Husserl and Heidegger* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell Univ. Press, 1976). It is a distinction of this volume that it is (apparently) the only book on Stevens and poetry to quote the Heidegger scholar, William J. Richardson, S.J.

²² D. Thompsett, *Wallace Stevens and Pre-Socratic Philosophy: Metaphysics and the Play of Violence* (London: Routledge, 2012). See more broadly with reference to myth, K.S. Santilli, *Poetic Gesture: Myth, Wallace Stevens, and the Desirous Motions of Poetic Language* (London: Routledge, 2013).

²³ S. Gardner, "Wallace Stevens and Metaphysics: The Plain Sense of Things," *European Journal of Philosophy*, 2 (1994): 322-344.

²⁴ S. Critchley, *Things Merely Are: Philosophy in the Poetry of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

²⁵ S. Critchley, "The Philosophical Significance of a Poem (On Wallace Stevens)," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 96 (1996): 269-292.

²⁶ The designation appears in C. Altieri's "Stevens and the Crisis of European Philosophy" in B. Eeckhout and E. Ragg (eds.), *Wallace Stevens Across the Atlantic* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 61-78, at p. 70. There are Dutch Stevens experts, as Bart Eeckhout is, because of course, we will need to remember this at the end, Stevens was, as he tells us himself, "on his mother's side, Pennsylvania Dutch. The differences between the reference fade in terms (Holland or Germany) but Jarrell will need it for his account.

²⁷ F. Kermode, "Dwelling Poetically in Connecticut," in R. Buttel and F. Doggett (eds.), *Wallace Stevens: A Celebration* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2014), pp. 256-273.

Notebooks have hardly helped matter in the interim—nor can one quite riff, as Kermode tends to do, on Hölderlin's treatment of women as a matter of actual youthful virility, by contrast with the Heidegger who was, so Hannah Arendt might have been able to tell us, even as Giorgio Agamben underscores this encounter during the writing of *Being and Time*,²⁸ already, at least in her eyes, old.²⁹

For his part, Kermode seems unaware of Hölderlin's affairs (and disastrous consequences for the women involved, pre-Susette Gontard) but tells us that neither epithet would have applied to Stevens which can be surprising given what Stevens says of "masculine virility" in his 1943 Mount Holyoke lecture: "The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet."

You can imagine in a time of war just how that title might have gone over at Mount Holyoke. A great deal has been written about this including authors as significant (and as Analytically positioned) as Stanley Cavell. The title, like many of Stevens's titles, is irresistible, especially to men, as most Stevens specialists are, with noted exceptions. Stevens had his own issues.

And he has allure.

If T.S. Eliot takes us to the beach, shall we wear our *trousers rolled*, or to London Bridge, *I had not thought death had undone so many*, Stevens puts his poetry in the sound of his words, his titles already tell us, *The Idea of Order at Key West*. And then there is what he can do with an *Of*, and we philosophers are more than resentful, we're jealous, writing *Of Mere Being*. And with Stevens, we can philosophize as we can poetize, at the kitchen table.

The celebration of the ordinary has been with us now for some time, and if in philosophy we largely think of Stanley Cavell on the ordinary, by way of Harvard, *In Quest of the Ordinary*.³⁰ Tracy Strong writes about this, likewise via Harvard, describing his encounter with Cavell, whom he does not name by name, in an otherwise carefully detailed description of a late night meeting with students in 1969 with an unforgettable faculty member, in the Preface to his *The Politics of the*

²⁸ See for reference, B. Babich, "Great Men, Little Black Dresses, & the Virtues of Keeping One's Feet on the Ground," *MP: An Online Feminist Journal* 3 (2010): 58-78, at p. 75.

²⁹ One of the more important reflections in Simone de Beauvoir's discussions of women often rebuked for their immaturity as consorts of famous writers, because—here she is speaking of Sophie in relation to Leo Tolstoy—"in many cases the woman is a child, not because she is a woman but because she is in fact very young." S. de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshely (New York: Vintage, 1989), p. 460.

³⁰ S. Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1988).

Ordinary: "It was not persuasion but presence. The students heard a voice; having read the work, I saw the man."³¹ The cachet of the ordinary is today still and to a certain extent an homage to Cavell, but Wallace Stevens is one of its prophets. To this extent, it is relevant that a poem featured early in Stevens's first book of poetry, *Harmonium* (1923) is entitled: *The Ordinary Women*.³² The word recurs in the title of a later poem, *An Ordinary Evening in New Haven*, and not only that, references to themes, and to the women, including the letters, with a crucial difference

From the window sills at the alphabets,
At beta b and gamma g

What had been "canting curlicues" acquires weight

Reality is the beginning not the end,
Naked Alpha, not the hierophant Omega.
Of dense investiture, with luminous vassals.

The question of Bloomian resentment is the perfection of the culture of the commonplace. And conventionally so, to go back to Horkheimer and Adorno on commodification. Write on themes no one else writes about and no publisher will publish your work. Fairly so: one needs readers, peers for peer review, conferences to go to. Cliché is supreme for a reason.

Peter Sloterdijk writes about Rainer Maria Rilke and his archaic torso, because we know, in tiny and precise detail, all the way down, quite so, that I, that we, that *you*, as Rilke says, *you have* to change your life.³³ *Du muss dein Leben ändern. Muss*: that would be the whole of Kant's categorical imperative in a word. It is no accident that this is the same claim Adorno makes with respect to Beethoven's "Rage for a Lost Penny."

In Rilke's case, when it comes to the archaic torso of Apollo, the concision trips us. Whatever does Rilke mean by *fur, Raubtierfelle*, it's "German," to quote Jarrell's *Deutsch durch Freud*. With the *Duino Elegies*, the length is problematic as readers begin by supposing themselves already certain, what after all do you need to know? to know something of beauty, of the beginning of terror, quite before the

³¹ T.B. Strong, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: The Politics of the Ordinary* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1994), p. xxi.

³² See W. Stevens, *Collected Poetry and Prose* (New York: Library of America, 1997), p. 8. See for one discussion, B. Madden, "What's So Ordinary about Stevens' 'The Ordinary Women?'," *Wallace Stevens Journal* 36 (2012): 9-22 and, more broadly, S. Phillips, "Wallace Stevens and the Mode of the Ordinary," *Twentieth Century Literature* 54 (2008): 1-30.

³³ P. Sloterdijk, *You Must Change Your Life*, trans. W. Hobart (London: Polity, 2013).

poem swallows one in its entanglements, the chained order of angels— *und gesetzt selbst, es nähme einer mich plötzlich ans Herz: ich verginge von seinem stärkeren Dasein,* and God and lovers and thoughts that stay the night.

So we read Stevens with his jar catch the care of place and placement, count the eye of the blackbird—this is before *Twin Peaks*—and Stevens serves as foil for Jarrell who is, because one might have, given another world and time, written this essay on Jarrell.

Jarrell is not only intriguing for having been (quite as Hemmingway was and we will get to him) exceptionally fond of cats but he was author of *The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner*, a poem so spare, almost barely more than the parlor trick played by primary school teachers on their charges, seducing them into thinking that the rhythms of poetry might be a matter of counting syllables in a recipe. Isn't that all you need for a haiku?³⁴

Jarrell tells the story of life in its rupture, its interruption, conscious flow, ecstatic to itself, oblique, uncanny reflection:

From my mother's sleep I fell into the State,
And I hunched in its belly till my wet fur froze.
Six miles from earth, loosed from its dream of life,
I woke to black flak and the nightmare fighters.
When I died they washed me out of the turret with a hose.

It is the rhythm that makes this poem but it's also juxtaposition as that works with rhyme, it is shock and it is surprise, as Archilochus first taught this with his lyric invention: the line has to catch us in its grip:

I hunched in its belly till my wet fur froze

And all the viscerality of the epigrammatic epode is there, even without Greek measures, long and short, the poet gets there with gathered horror and the visceral

in -its belly -till my -wet -fur- froze

I don't need to repeat the jangled reference, I fell, from sleep, from the dream of life, and "woke to black flak." So that, still talking, I can tell you still, this is a lyric, that when I died, they washed me out of the turret with a hose. It makes every bit of

³⁴ B. Babich, "Two Sets of Three Short Poems for Peter Money, *To the Lady in Pink Standing On Top the Bridge*," *Dublin Haiku Project* (September 2020), in press.

difference for us as philosophers to remember not only our Nietzsche who writes on what he calls “grand politics” and what they cost in his *Human, All too Human*,³⁵ but not less Thomas Hobbes, because the state into which he, the ball turret gunner, just a boy, in his dissonant fall from his mother’s sleep, that state into which he fell, is the Leviathan.

When Stevens reflects, just to recall the ordinary with which we began above he speaks in *Examination of the Hero in a Time of War*, and we may note the difference with the “virile poet” in the ideal, the language is that of the common:

The common man is the common hero.
The common hero is the hero.
Imprimatur. But then there’s common fortune,
Induced by what you will, the entrails
Of a cat, twelve dollars for the devil,
A kneeling woman, a moon’s farewell;
And common fortune, induced by nothing,
Unwished for, chance, the merest riding
Of the wind, rain in a dry September,
The improvisations of the cuckoos
In a clock-shop . . . Soldier, think, in the darkness,
Repeating two neatly measured stations,
Of less neatly measured common-places.

Two stanzas prior, we read

The Got whome we serve is able to deliver
Us. Good chemistry, good common man, what
Of that angelic sword? Creature of
Ten times ten times dynamite, convulsive
Angel, convulsive shatterer, ...
...

Wallace Stevens and Philosophy

I began this essay above with an epigraph on rhythm to which I hope to return at the end and by speaking of virility as Stevens describes Hölderlin and I noted the thematics of male critics and their own emphases on the same virility, *bien*

³⁵ The text is very complicated and political theorists have been writing about it for a long time, as what else could ‘grand politics’ mean than something grand. See, for a discussion, B. Babich, “Between Nietzsche and Marx: ‘Great Politics and What They Cost,’” in C. Payne and M. Roberts (eds.), *Nietzsche and Critical Social Theory: Affirmation, Animosity, and Ambiguity* (Amsterdam: Brill, 2020).

entendu, as idea. To this, I add the question of style where the tone and references have changed, along with everything to be read in Stevens' *Necessary Angel*³⁶ and his "A Collect of Philosophy"³⁷ quite along with the question of nobility in what Nietzsche named the "Pathos of Distance,"³⁸ the mischief being the elusive question of Nietzsche's "noble," this is what is esoteric in Nietzsche as Nietzsche's noble is neither the Hegelian master nor the Hegelian absolute—just for the sake of a possible advance towards what Stevens called a "Collect," *Oremus, Let us Pray*, in Chicago, on the 16 of November 1951, gathering the faithful to and crossing the border between "philosophy" and "poetry."

Paul Weiss, then-editor of *The Review of Metaphysics*, would have the pleasure of refusing "A Collect of Philosophy" when Stevens offered it to him: saying, the patronizing style of the Analytic mainstream is familiar, that he was "embarrassed" by the "elementary quotations and references," observing, another mainstream trope, that Stevens *did not do* what Weiss "hoped he would do," namely, to say "what it is that philosophy and poetry both see."³⁹ Stevens refused to submit the essay to another journal and Weiss knew what Stevens ought to have done and said *and* that he did not do or say it.

But here the beleaguered distinction to be made between, *pars pro toto*, Analytic philosophy, to which loose tradition must be counted Paul Weiss, despite being more process or pragmatist than one usually means when one is speaking of Analytic philosophy, as opposed to the Continental types who sought to make an alliance with process/pragmatist philosophy, persuaded, somehow, that an enemy of my enemy is my friend.

The problem is obvious to us, we professors of philosophy. Stevens's collect begins by recounting the fact of having first written to Jean Wahl, fatal flag, reporting Wahl's demurral, before proceeding to Plato, poet before he burnt his poems, and Nietzsche, Wallace Stevens just mirrors Bertrand Russell there, as for Russell, to say that Nietzsche is more poet than philosopher is to say that he is not worth reading. Stevens then turns to Bergson and Leibniz, citing Russell's claim that

³⁶ W. Stevens, *Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and Imagination* (New York: Knopf, 1951 [1942]).

³⁷ Stevens, "A Collect of Philosophy."

³⁸ This phrase is rarely reviewed in its force, even by Nietzsche scholars, and appears in the second section of the first essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals*. I seek to discuss this in my own reading of the *Genealogy* elsewhere but it remains relevant to further research that Nietzsche uses the phrase only twice.

³⁹ Cited in P. Brazeau, "Wallace Stevens on the Podium: The Poet as Public Man of Letters," *The Wallace Stevens Journal* 1 (1977): 120-128.

“Leibniz’s monads were gods.”⁴⁰ The cardinal sin’s sway between having begun with a reference to Wahl—this was fatal for Stevens then.⁴¹

But Weiss’s problems would not have been limited to the reference to Wahl, less than good, because in his essay, Stevens, awful to say, goes on to cite a translator, one Benjamin Jowett on Plato’s *Phaedo*, in support of the claim Stevens began with as he repeats the declaration in his letter to the French existentialist Heideggerian, Jean Wahl, (Stevens repeats this, his own claim throughout): “Poets and philosophers often think alike.”⁴²

Stevens claims that he does not by this mean “a poetic way of writing.” No Nietzsche then—though Stevens does refer to him in his *Description Without Place*, a poem dating from 1945, “To Nietzsche in Basel, to Lenin by a lake”—as Stevens follows Russell to the letter in his letter to Weiss,⁴³ noting Whitehead. Weiss might have appreciated this but then Stevens goes on to quotes James, complaining of Bergson’s “incessant euphony.”⁴⁴ If this were not enough, the subsequent references would assure that his text would/could never see the light of day in *The Review of Metaphysics*, for Stevens goes on to quote a paragraph from Weiss’s own reproving letter, moving between St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Bonaventure, Descartes and his machines, Leibniz, Kant, and Hegel. As Habermas once said to Cavell’s friend and help in matters German, as I was told by Herr Fischer himself, a former boxer, philosopher, and psychoanalyst (none of his titles could save him), *So macht man das nicht, Herr Fischer*.

In Stevens’s “Two or Three Ideas,” reflecting, the first idea, on Baudelaire and Yeats, the second, “on “poetry and the gods, both ancient and modern,” Stevens writes,

One has to pierce through the dithyrambic impressions that talk of the gods makes to the reality of what is being said. What is being said must be true and the truth of it must be seen. But the truth about the poet in a time of disbelief is not that he turn evangelist. After all, he shares the disbelief of his time.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Stevens, “A Collect of Philosophy,” p. 268.

⁴¹ Along with Alan Schrift, Ian Alexander Moore has brought Jean Wahl into greater Anglophone accessibility, in *Transcendence and the Concrete, Wahls’s Selected Writings* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017) so that non-Francophone readers might be even less excused for not reading him as they should.

⁴² Stevens, “A Collect of Philosophy,” p. 269.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 270.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ W. Stevens, “Two or Three Ideas,” in Stevens, *Opus Posthumous*, pp. 257-266, at p. 264.

Elsewhere Stevens cites, had one been wondering what Weiss might have wanted, *both* Cassirer *and* A.J. Ayer *and* William James appending James Joyce to boot, along with Pascal and Aloysius Gonzaga.⁴⁶

J. Hillis Miller tells us that Stevens read Emerson and Schopenhauer. If there are some philosophers (I don't know any) who doubt that Emerson is a philosopher, most of us would count Schopenhauer, but—thus Weiss's refusal is Analytically *au courant*—provided it is decanted into Analytic prose. We fetishize clarity—whatever 'clarity' might mean. Schopenhauer will not do, that's *history of philosophy* and any time the term "history of philosophy" is mentioned the territory is Analytic. And Stevens, I said he insisted on his point, aligning poetry and philosophy, citing Nietzsche's colleague Jacob Burckhardt, who observed, following Schopenhauer and Aristotle, "that poetry achieves more for the knowledge of human nature than history."⁴⁷ Thus we find our poet speaking to his undergraduates in "The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet."

In another context I would wish to emphasize Schopenhauer as key to Stevens's observation concerning the evanescence of the novel, of poetry as the supreme fiction, all those representations, lamenting the loss, this too is the part of the masculine, as Stevens saw it, not unlike Machiavelli's *virtu*, and the lament that is time, of the new, the latest of latest things.

Here one must think through what I call the poet as travelogue, this fits Stevens, this is space, we will not get to time, travels down south, to Key West, that is *The Idea of Order at Key West*, and everything she sang.

If not everyone is happy to read Wallace Stevens in the context of philosophy, Paul Weiss emphatically was not, reading Stevens together with Heidegger turns out to be as high church a context as you please, and thus unwelcome for fans of Harold Bloom as much as for Charles Altieri, and he means well, or Frank Kermode whose intentions are more restrained. Here it is worth noting that even recent philosophically attuned assessments of this refusal tend to repeat Weiss's terms and claims whereby the *Review of Metaphysics* morphs into the most recondite of "technical journals." Jude Dougherty would have been delighted. I to be sure would have given that attribute to *Synthese* or *Nous*, but there you go.

⁴⁶ James Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, cited in Stevens, "Imagination as a Value," in W. Stevens, *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and Imagination* (New York: Knopf, 1951 [1942]), pp. 131-156, at p. 142.

⁴⁷ Stevens, "The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet," in Stevens, *The Necessary Angel*, pp. 37-67, at p. 68.

As Randall Jarrell reminds us in his “Reflections on Wallace Stevens,” “[p]oetry is a bad medium for philosophy.”⁴⁸ When Frank Kermode writes in his “Dwelling Poetically in Connecticut” (Kermode quotes Heidegger quoting Hölderlin, so he means the resonance),⁴⁹ that Stevens was mostly keen on fine bindings and limited editions, Kermode tells us about Kermode obviously and not Stevens. For a man of Stevens’s generation and formation, to be a poet, and to be one with the taste for x and the budget for y, as he wrote to his art dealer in Paris—note that he had an art dealer in Paris—also had an appreciation for the differences between public sculpture in the Americas, fond of it only provided it resembled sculptures one might find in Europe.

Stevens ordered one copy of a limited-edition printing, only 51 were printed, of Hölderlin’s poems, and Kermode, perplexed, points out that Stevens wrote to congratulate the printer, Victor Hammer, on the quality of the book *qua* book, bringing poems to the page for the precise difference this would make, this is poetry in the age of Sandburg, e.e. cummings, Hemingway, and Stevens. This is also feeling and form, and it is why Stevens could tell his editor, as Kermode remarks with some horror, “that he would rather rewrite lines in *Notes toward a Supreme Fiction* than have ugly turnovers in the printed copy.”⁵⁰ To get one’s poetry in print would be to get it printed in a journal where the quality of the printing would make or fail to make all the difference.

Kermode begins by noting this, yet the fustian style of his remark undoes his observation as well as what he then goes on to worry, and we today, reading poems on Kindle and on the Internet may accidentally find ourselves anticipating and agreeing with Kermode’s reservation: surely such a thing make no difference: There was also a proper *mise en scène* for poetry; he cared for the physical presentation of his and other people’s poems, as if their disclosures, even the most exalted, the closest to a final truth, required the art of the typographer and the gold, leather, and linen of the binder as accompaniments to revelation.⁵¹

But, of course: they do.

To understand the connection between poetry and philosophy requires everything about feeling and form, everything philosophically required, presupposed to understand the line from Stevens I quoted in a chapter entitled *Mousiké techné*:

⁴⁸ R. Jarrell, “Reflections on Wallace Stevens,” *Poetry and the Age*, p. 139.

⁴⁹ Kermode, “Dwelling Poetically in Connecticut,” p. 261.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 256.

Music is feeling, then, not sound.⁵²

A good deal is written on Stevens and phenomenology, lamenting the absent bits one takes to be phenomenology. What is missing for Kermode but not for Stevens is the hermeneutics of reading a published text. To illustrate this kind of material hermeneutic, reading the 2001 paperback edition of Randall Jarrell's *Poetry and the Age*, we read the final line on the facing page, as if emphasised: "Poetry is a bad medium for philosophy."⁵³ Reading the Jarrell essay collection, *No Other Book* published in 1999,⁵⁴ the same lines appear on the opposite page and we are able, or induced, so our neuroscience-minded theorists of eye and mind tell us, although our smart phones and the internet train us in the same scanning modes, to read the full sentence, set off by a break in the text with a little horizontal line:

The habit of philosophising in poetry—or of seeming to philosophize, of using a philosophical tone, images, constructions, of having quasi-philosophical daydreams—has been unfortunate for Stevens.⁵⁵

Jarrell's point reflects the Scylla and Charybdis, the shoals of incommensurable schemes, and different types of philosophising, and different assumptions of what one takes one's philosophy to be.

Jarrell is talking Analytic philosophy, already the thing in Stevens' day. By contrast,

A good poet is one who manages, in a lifetime of standing out in thunderstorms, to be struck by lightning five or six times, a dozen or two dozen times, and he is great.⁵⁶

The last poem Stevens would write, thus the echo, poet to poet, Jarrell to Stevens, Eliot's dedication of *The Wasteland* to Pound, words to the better poet, after all, *il miglior fabbro*, the better ποιητής, crafted pure art and lightning struck one last time—one last line:

The bird's fire-fangled feathers dangle down.

⁵² Babich, *The Hallelujah Effect*, citing Stevens, *Peter Quince at the Clavier*, p. 167.

⁵³ R. Jarrell, "Reflections on Wallace Stevens," in R. Jarrell, *Poetry and the Age* (London: Faber and Faber, 1955), pp. 124-136, at p. 129.

⁵⁴ R. Jarrell, "Reflections on Wallace Stevens" in R. Jarrell, *No Other Book: Selected Essays*, ed. B. Leithauser (New York: Harper, 1999), pp. 112-122, at p. 116.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Jarrell, *Poetry and the Age*, p. 139.

Hunting philosophic influences in Stevens, Kermode contends without an argument that Stevens's poem, "'The Bird with the Coppery, Keen Claws' must be sought in William James's *The Pluralistic Universe*."⁵⁷ One has to take Kermode's word for it because Kermode rides James's argument for the feather metonymic, "the whole bird," not the Orphic egg—this is not James's style. Reading Stevens, one should not fail to catch metal and never forget, think of his *Things of August*, color arrayed in space:

We make, although inside an egg,
Variations on the words spread sail.

The morning glories grow in the egg.
It is full of the myrrh and camphor of summer.

And Adirondack glittering. The cat hawks it
And the hawk cats it and we say spread sail.

Spread sail, we say spread white, spread way.
The shell is a shore. The egg of the sea

And the egg of the sky are inshells, in walls, in skins
And the egg of the earth lies deep within an egg.

Occasioning Color

The first line of Stevens's last poem draws a great deal of attention from his readers, especially perhaps among philosophers, seemingly unassuming as American philosophy can tend to be, that there was nothing required of the reader to grasp the meaning of

The palm at the end of the mind,
Beyond the last thought, rises
In the bronze decor,

If the bronze décor could surprise, even with the reference to "coppery, keen claws"—let us not forget Stevens's blind "parakeet of parakeets":

As his pure intellect applies its laws,
He moves not on his coppery, keen claws.

He munches a dry shell while he exerts

⁵⁷ Kermode, "Dwelling Poetically in Connecticut," 260.

His will, yet never ceases, perfect cock,
To flare, in the sun-pallor of his rock.

The bird is blind; he does not move. This is the reason why, “parakeet of parakeets,”

He is not paradise of parakeets,
Of his gold ether, golden alguazil,
Except because he broods there and is still.

To get to this last poem, *Of Mere Being*, it would take a Helen Vendler, a Harold Bloom, the best names, I’ve just counted off Harvard and Yale, to tell us the poet’s meaning in the background, and lesser readers can fall silent.

One of Stevens’ philosophical admirers was Richard Cobb-Stevens. I say this in his memory⁵⁸ as Richard tended to be stunned when it came to Wallace Stevens’s color language: coppery keen claws, gold ether, golden alguazil, bronze decor.⁵⁹ Not only Stevens poetry, but in philosophy too, it is color, in this case, the yellow, the amount of it, that is the only thing Maurice Merleau-Ponty needs to explain space and time.

Elsewhere, I write on Merleau-Ponty and affect *and* color with respect to space,⁶⁰ its perception, its requirement of all sense, as Merleau-Ponty suggests who did not stop there, repeating the same reference, the same image again, and again, that is the working method of phenomenology, variation, in the French mode and so Merleau-Ponty quoted Jean-Paul Sartre who wrote of nothing more than yellow, the same yellow that stunned the then-Jesuit, Richard Stevens, turning over the image in his mind:

⁵⁸ Richard Cobb-Stevens (1935-2018), a theorist of Husserl and Analytic philosophy and William James, hated Heidegger (academics are often as much driven by what they hate as not) but was fond of Wallace Stevens, part of which affection I attributed to the fact that they shared last names: whereby Richard Stevens, the author of *James and Husserl: The Foundations of Meaning* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1974) became Cobb-Stevens, having married the philosopher Veda Cobb by the time he wrote *Husserl and Analytic Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1990).

⁵⁹ A memorial conference held at Boston College September 2019, featuring the brilliance of Dan Dahlstrom and Robert Sokolowski in stunning form, included a number of his students (I was not, as he would complain, one of these), and his more junior students and even his colleagues at Boston College had some fun with those moments of silence as in later years on this report, he simply gave out, focussing on a yellow. *Yellow—can you imagine that?* they laughed. Of course, not having read the texts above, they missed Richard’s and Merleau-Ponty’s Sartrean references.

⁶⁰ See, for example, B. Babich, “On Merleau-Ponty’s Crystal Lamellae: Aesthetic Space-Perception, Anger, and the Political” in P. Kontos and V. Foti (eds.), *Political and Philosophical Essays for Jacques Taminiaux* (Frankfurt: Springer, 2017), pp. 125-154, along with B. Babich, “The Aesthetics of the Between: On Beauty and Artbooks, Museums and Artists,” *Culture, Theory and Critique* 55 (2014): 51–78, at pp. 55f.

That yellow rent in the sky over Golgotha ... is an anguish made thing, an anguish which has turned into a yellow rent in the sky and which is immediately submerged and thickened by the qualities appropriate to things."⁶¹

Merleau-Ponty who goes on to explain this *quote* from Sartre, the philosopher always in dialogue as French philosophers of the Continental style tend to be in dialogue with others, in this case with Malraux, who in turn speaks of Renoir, on the question of color, as Malraux writes, as Merleau-Ponty continues now to take over his words, which

was less a way of looking at the sea than the secret elaboration of a world to which that depth of blue whose immensity he was recapturing pertained.⁶²

As Merleau-Ponty proceeds to quote Paul Valéry in saying, "the painter takes his body with him,"⁶³ this is a way of conveying what Merleau-Ponty just a little later will call, note the distinction set off in quotes, "the 'other side' of looking."⁶⁴ This "other side" will be all the sides of perception, as he writes in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, inasmuch as we *also*

see the depth, speed, softness and hardness of objects—Cezanne says we even see their odour.⁶⁵

Merleau-Ponty repeats the reference to Cezanne again and again quite as Nietzsche also connects knowledge, *sentio* and *sapio*, the last including, for Nietzsche, both taste and smell.⁶⁶

It is because Merleau-Ponty also cites Cezanne with respect to the painter's own preoccupation with science as such, as Patrick Heelan likewise emphasizes with

⁶¹ M. Merleau-Ponty, "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence," trans. R. McCleary, in M. Merleau-Ponty, *Signs* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1964), pp. 39-83, at p. 55, citing Jean-Paul Sartre, *Situations*.

⁶² Merleau-Ponty, "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence," p. 56.

⁶³ M. Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," trans. C. Dallery, in M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1964), pp. 159-192, at p. 162.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ M. Merleau-Ponty, "Cezanne's Doubt," trans. H. Dreyfus and P. Dreyfus, in M. Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1964), pp. 9-25, at p. 15.

⁶⁶ See, for a discussion of this sense and etymological dimension of taste, B. Babich, "Editor's Introduction: On Signatures and Taste, Hume's Mortal Leavings and Lucian" in B. Babich (ed.), *Of David Hume's "Of the Standard of Taste"* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019), 3-22.

respect to Cezanne,⁶⁷ that “[c]olor is the ‘place where our brain and the universe meet.’”⁶⁸ How is color the place? We think of Stevens’s “bronze decor,” a color substantive, like Stevens’s “coppery, keen claws,” Merleau-Ponty goes on to write almost in Stevensian tones that “there is no one master key of the visible.”⁶⁹ One needs for Merleau-Ponty, to “break up the form spectacle,” for the sake of color. Thus “*The Portrait of Valier* sets white spaces ... a being more general than the yellow-being or green-being or blue-being.”⁷⁰

Randall Jarrell reads Heidegger not Merleau-Ponty to read his Stevens. This was a time, as Alasdair MacIntyre memorializes the era in *After Virtue*, in which G.E. Moore is as thunderous as Einstein, opening, as MacIntyre has it, “a new heaven”:⁷¹

It was nowhere else, it was there and because
It was nowhere else, its place had to be supposed,
Itself had to be supposed, a thing supposed,
In a place supposed, a thing that reached
In a place that reached. ...

Jarrell cites this to jar the well-intentioned reader by reminding the reader not of some but all of Stevens’ poetry’s tendency to tedium, this rhymes, no accident intended, with *Harmonium*, thus to emphasize that this is, as Jarrell writes, “G.E. Moore at the spinet.”⁷²

Right enough as I also just quoted Stevens’s *Peter Quince at the Clavier*, all allusion as I noted then to Herrick’s *Julia*, poets do that

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

The lines mark out the differences between male and female desire, and to write about this took an entire book for me, *The Hallelujah Effect*, but for Stevens percolating a few lines:

⁶⁷ See P. Heelan, *Space-Perception and the Philosophy of Science* (Berkeley, CA: Univ. of California Press, 1983).

⁶⁸ Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind,” p. 181.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1984), p. 14.

⁷² Jarrell, “Reflections on Wallace Stevens,” p. 144.

Thinking of your blue-shadowed silk,
Is music, It is like the strain
Waked in the elders by Susanna.

Whose strain, which elders? Stevens doesn't tell us, he doesn't need to:

She walked upon the grass,
Still quavering

And we read on, just a little more, we knew that it was coming:

Anon, the lamps uplifted flame
Reveal Susanna and her shame.

Her shame: of course it was.

The poem that captures the philosopher today, as it captures Critchley who also writes, titling his book with the same lines, mereness, that he also used to write about Levinas, pre-Platonic thinking, Shakespeare, too, is *The Idea of Order at Key West*.

Stevens takes us there in our minds, even those of us who write books like *The Hallelujah Effect* to unpack the difference that is the difference of desire, male and female. For Stevens,

She sang beyond the genius of the sea.

We read on to find ourselves confronted with the sea monster Nietzsche also invokes along with Aeschylus to tell us of the waves, countless, unquenchable, of laughter, ancient laughter.

Made constant cry, caused constantly a cry
That was not ours although we understood,
Inhuman, of the veritable ocean.

Nietzsche writes of what he calls, referring now to Newton, *actio in distans*, where he writes about women, and it would inspire Derrida, as we heard him at the start, it is the theme of *Spurs*, Nietzsche, but the subject will be woman, says Derrida, but we have already seen, at the start if not what Nietzsche means, certainly what Derrida suggests.

As Nietzsche reflects, this pretended better self hides petty noise. Both perspectives are voices of male desire, observed admiration *and* minimalizing qualification. As Stevens writes

For she was the maker of the song she sang.
The ever-hooded, tragic-gestured sea
Was merely a place by which she walked to sing.
Whose spirit is this? we said, because we knew
It was the spirit that we sought and knew
That we should ask this often as she sang.

She is not the key to the poem, *The Idea of Order at Key West*.

This we know in the same way that the poet can tell us that

... when she sang, the sea,
Whatever self it had, became the self
That was her song, for she was the maker.

She is that dream projected as Nietzsche writes in the second book of *The Gay Science*,

A spiritlike, intermediate being: quietly observing, gliding, floating. (GS §60)

It is for the same reason that “she” in Stevens’s poem is only she, forever she, at one with the sea, regarded not by Stevens alone, because always mediated by and with another, that is not she, the we that corresponds to the other to whom the poetry speaks.

Then we,

As we beheld her striding there alone,
Knew that there never was a world for her
Except the one she sang and, singing, made.

The address, in this case is to one named or else a name is given that we the readers can also share, travelogue of the mind as this is: we get his full name, “Ramon Fernandez, tell me, if you know,” before the poet asks an impossible question of topologies and demarcating lines

... why the glassy lights,
The lights in the fishing boats at anchor there,
As the night descended, tilting in the air,

Mastered the night and portioned out the sea ...

Or maybe the named Ramon did know, as we continue to read, the poem's stunning conclusion, every line wrought, of course it is wrought,⁷³ every word he, the poet, sang of the unnamed she, the "Inhuman sea," written to culminate in this verse, these words

Oh! Blessed rage for order, pale Ramon,
The maker's rage to order words of the sea,
Words of the fragrant portals, dimly-starred,
And of ourselves and of our origins,
In ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds.

Poetic Virility

Here one can return to the nasty charm, itself a token of a past generation of American authors, of the exchange of poetic insults between Wallace Stevens and Robert Frost, where Stevens charges Frost, "The trouble with you, is you write about things," to Frost's retort: "The trouble with you is you write about bric-a-brac."⁷⁴

Both of these things, this is the real virility of poetry, are virtues in their turn and in their way and thus the achievement of the male poet. This is not Emily Dickinson's things and it is not Edna St. Vincent Millay's bric-a-brac, none of that.

For Jarrell, the problem is Stevens's language, not at its best, and Jarrell vies with Stevens and with a few others in the raw American mastery of the word contra the King's English in order to write against the same English, now elevated to philosophy:

All his *tunk-a-tunks*, his *hoo-goo-boos*—those mannered, manufactured, individual uninteresting little sound-inventions—how typical they are of the lecture style of the English philosopher, who makes grunts or odd noises⁷⁵

Of course this is true: Stevens rhymes 'eglantine' with 'concubine', 'demi-monde' with 'mezzanine' in his *Anything is Beautiful If You Say It Is*. But, just to be clear, this is Emotivism: we are not talking Continental style, this is the Oxbridge professor's sneer, the style of the Analytic philosopher who punctuates what he says—thus Stevens even refers to "bare feet"—not with the reference as we cited Merleau-

⁷³ I discuss this with reference to the art of the contemporary via a reading of Edgar Allen Poe

⁷⁴ J. Longenbach, "Stevens and his Contemporaries," in J. Serio (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Wallace Stevens* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007), pp. 76-86, at p. 76.

⁷⁵ Jarrell, "Reflections on Wallace Stevens," p. 142.

Ponty, to the yellow rent in the sky at Golgotha but, thus to empiricism, with “homely illustrations ... in order to give what he says some appearance of that raw reality it so plainly lacks.”⁷⁶

It is because Stevens is one of those poets head-drenched as Hölderlin was, so we are told, in fire, struck by lightning, it is because Stevens is in league with a Tiepolo or a Poussin that gives Jarrell the poetic space needed for the human poem that is Wallace Stevens:

His best poems are the poetry of a man fully human—of someone sympathetic, magnanimous, both brightly and deeply intelligent; the poems see, feel, and think with equal success.⁷⁷

This kind of poetry, as Jarrell says, “knows the size and age of the world.” To this same extent,

when you have finished reading Steven’s best poems you remember once more that man is not only the jest and riddle of the world, but the glory.⁷⁸

Thus Jarrell writes as a poet, about Stevens, as a poet, comparing him to an elephant, beyond the omnipresent allure of the referent of the day, *The Little Prince*, all *sic et non*, but all the dimensionality of Jarrell’s own poetic rhythm:

Stevens is full of the natural or Aristotelian virtues; he is, in the terms of Hopkins’ poem, all windhover and no Jesuit. There is about him, under the translucent glazes, a Dutch solidity and weight; he sits surrounded by all the good things of this earth, with rosy cheeks and fresh clear blue eyes, eyes not going out to you but shining in their place, like fixed stars.⁷⁹

For Jarrell, “Stevens is the poet of well-being ... of awe, of wondering pleasure.” Is this to be matched to the “virile poet”? I think a Kierkegaard might have begun to argue this had he been, as many Kierkegaardians happen to be, American but this surely corresponds to the stuff of philosophy, for Plato, for Aristotle, for Wittgenstein, who was also impressed by the diagram snake/elephant.

If the male poet defines virility as the male poet does, the answer is already crafted: yes. “And next to love,” we read in *An Ordinary Evening in New Haven*, “is the desire for love.” One remembers that when Molly Bloom speaks in James Joyce’s

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ R. Jarrell, “Fifty Years of American Poetry,” in Jarrell, *No Other Book*, pp. 230-253, at pp. 236-237.

words, they are always words set in her mouth. As we recall reading *The Idea of Order at Key West*,

She sang beyond the genius of the sea.

And thus minded, perhaps we may begin to understand the place and ordering of connected space, the travelogue of the mind, arrayed between the locus of Key West, ecstatic distance from New York or Connecticut, of poetic arguments with Robert Frost, fisticuffs with Ernest Hemingway, instantly lost by the whichever virile poet, and the “veritable ocean.” The order, the idea is all to the poet’s own virile credit:

Oh! Blessed rage for order, pale Ramon,
The maker’s rage to order words of the sea ...

The language of color, the language of metal reminds us of that all of this is done, just as Austin claimed it was for the part of philosophy but always and from the start in poetry. This is the poet’s medium as it is he here and it is not she, the keener emphasis makes that unmistakable, as “there never was a world for her” even if we knew nothing of his wife, the Elsie of Pygmalion quality, minted beauty, nothing of his daughter Holly, who herself would dedicate her life to her father’s work, the poet, the he who orders

Words of the fragrant portals, dimly-starred,
And of ourselves and of our origins,
In ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds.

The heart of Stevens, travelogue of place and sentiment-suffused projection, poet’s dream, redolent of Merleau-Ponty’s “yellow rent” in the sky, underscoring Golgotha, recalling Stevens’s blind Parakeet of parakeets, leaves us with benediction and blessing on “coppery keen claws,” becalmed beauty, where it stands, “on the edge of space.”

We know this as the last of Stevens’s published poems, the final lines give us space and fire, as if to match Frost one last time, with a different rhyme:

The wind moves slowly in the branches.
The bird’s fire-fangled feathers dangle down.

But these are published words, ordered as this matters for the poet, arranged for the reader. In another of his later poems, Stephens reflects on his reflection, recounting in *Americana*, the difference between

A man that looks at himself in a glass and finds
It is the man in the glass, that lives, not he.

...
...He inhabits another man,
Other men, and not this glass, this valid air.
He is not himself. He is vitally deprived ...)

And in *Fairwell Without a Guitar*, this voice of consciousness still holds to virility,
even as he writes with all lucidity,

Head down. The reflections and repetitions
The blows and buffets of fresh senses
Of the rider that was.

Are a final construction,
Like glass and sun, of male reality
And of that other and her desire.

Coda

Considered from the end of life, we recall that the poet's virility shares the same *vir* with *virtue*, the word for excellence. This compound virility may also be heard at the end of Albert Camus's 1936, *Summer in Algiers* where Camus balances the dynamic tension of male and female in a moment, crucial for life, of "aesthetic science" as Nietzsche speaks of it in his first book, "involving perpetual strife, with only periodically intervening reconciliations."⁸⁰ These are the movements of life as of poetic rhythm, recalling Bettina von Arnim's recorded formula, heard from Hölderlin in his dark decades, his *Umnachtung*,⁸¹ as von Arnim's word inspires this essay's epigraph from Agamben.⁸² For his part, as it may help us to understand Hölderlin on rhythm, Agamben takes his focus on rhythm from the lyric poet Archilochus.⁸³ Archilochus urges his soul to learn the rhythm that holds human lives

⁸⁰ F. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music*, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967 [1872]), §1, 33.

⁸¹ B. von Arnim, *Die Götterode* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1982), p. 294.

⁸² G. Agamben, *The Man Without Content*, trans. G. Albert (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1999 [1994]), p. 94.

⁸³ See, on Archilochus for a reflection on this formula, on the very specific significance of referring to Archilochus in this case (Agamben does not say his name), B. Babich, "The Question of the Contemporary in Agamben, Nancy, Danto: Between Nietzsche's Artist and Nietzsche's Spectator" in P. de Assis and M. Schwab (eds.), *Futures of the Contemporary* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 2019), pp. 49-82, esp. at pp. 59-60 and, more generally, B. Babich, "Who is Nietzsche's Archilochus? Rhythm

from “the poetic lips of a god” — *Dichterlippen des Gottes*,⁸⁴ to repeat the words of the same she who epitomized Hölderlin with a word-image cited above and taken over by Jarrell to describe Stevens, poet “head-drenched in fire” after a lifetime of standing out in the rain — and Camus writes

In the evening or after the rain, the whole earth, its womb moist with a seed redolent of bitter almond, rests after having given herself to the sun all summer long. And again that scent hallows the union of man and earth and awakens in us the only really virile love in this world: ephemeral and noble.⁸⁵

and the Problem of the Subject,” in C. Bambach and T. George (eds.), *Philosophers and their Poets: Reflections on the Poetic Turn in Philosophy since Kant* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2019), pp. 85-114.

⁸⁴ von Arnim, *Die Günderröde*, p. 294.

⁸⁵ A. Camus, “Summer in Algiers,” in A. Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. J. O’Brien (New York: Vintage, 1955), pp. 104-113, at p. 113.

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