1973

The Function of Irony in Wallace Stevens' "Esthétique du mal"

Isota Tucker Epes

College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wm.edu/etd

Part of the American Literature Commons

Recommended Citation


https://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21220/s2-kc2y-za95

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects at W&M ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects by an authorized administrator of W&M ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@wm.edu.
THE FUNCTION OF IRONY IN WALLACE STEVENS' "ESTHÉTIQUE DU MAL"

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of English
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by
Isota Tucker Epes
1973
This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Approved, May 1973

John H. Willis, Jr. Ph.D.

Margaret W. Freeman, M.A.

Robert J. Scholnick, Ph.D.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER II. AESTHETICS AS APERCUŞ</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER III. THE RHETORIC OF IRONY</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER IV. THE IRONIC PROCESS IN ACTION</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER V. THE CONCLUSION: DOES IT SUFFICE?</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOOTNOTES</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writer wishes to express her appreciation to Professor John H. Willis, Jr., under whose guidance this paper was written, for his patient and judicious criticism. The author is also indebted to Professor Margaret W. Freeman and Professor Robert J. Scholnick for their careful reading of the manuscript.
The purpose of this essay is to analyze the function of irony in Wallace Stevens' controversial poem, "Esthétique du Mal," and by so doing to assess what this function contributes to an understanding of the work.

After a brief description of the circumstances of the poem's composition, the essay examines Stevens' unusual use of rhetorical devices, discussing these in four categories: veiled allusion, parody, intentional ambiguity, and satiric shifts in diction and tone. It then traces the way in which these rhetorical devices set up an ironic process which operates in a repeated series of statements and qualifications or negations until a tenable statement is achieved in Canto XV. Next it considers in some detail the ironic commentary made by the cantos on one another through association within the context of the whole. Finally, the closing canto is discussed at length to determine how the ironic process contributes to the poem's conclusion.

The results of this analysis suggest that cited criticism of the poem's statements in various cantos is based on a misunderstanding of the ironic process described. More important, the clarification of this process reveals a sense of the complexity, subtlety and unity within this remarkable work which is not otherwise apparent.
THE FUNCTION OF IRONY IN WALLACE STEVENS'

"ESTHÉTIQUE DU MAL"
INTRODUCTION

"Esthétique du Mal" is one of Wallace Stevens' most serious poems on an undeniably serious subject: the means by which modern man, deprived of his religious fictions, tries to deal with the reality of pain and evil. Nevertheless, Stevens' treatment of his subject is characteristically and consistently ironic. In every section he introduces contradictions by means of veiled allusion, parody, intentional ambiguity or sudden satiric shifts of diction and tone. Until the reader is fully aware of the scope of this irony, much of the design of the poem remains obscure.

Because the term "irony" is itself elusive, perhaps this working definition by Robert Boies Sharpe will prove useful:

Intellectually, irony is the perception of dilemma, of paradox. Emotionally, in the feelings that go with this intellectual perception of things contradictory, we think and speak of irony as an attitude, a temper, a spirit in which one looks at life and art. It brings to light and emphasizes by art the contradictions of living.\(^1\)

The particular value of this definition is that it includes the older concept of irony as the voicing of the opposite of what one really means and wishes to be understood as meaning with the broader concept of the ironist as a man who understands that two contradictory things can be present at the same time and, instead of cancelling each other, are both, in some sense, simultaneously true.
Stevens is a master ironist, both in the stricter verbal sense and in the broader perceptual sense, as any reader, faced with his challenging complexity, must immediately realize.

Composed of fifteen cantos of loosely iambic verse, "Esthétique" "does not unfold in logical steps, but is rather a variety of dramatizations of a theme."\(^2\) The cantos are, in fact, designed to be a sort of exploration by trial and error of the possibility of an aesthetic of pain and evil. The poem does not present a reasoned argument, but is itself a critical process in which the reader participates.

As each canto proposes a new approach to pain and evil, it simultaneously disposes, through irony, of the feasibility of this approach for the modern aesthetic consciousness, until, at last, a tenable view is achieved in Canto XV. It is my contention that only by examining the function of irony in detail is the reader able to understand the process fully and to grasp the intricate, fugue-like design of the poem which has been described by Northrop Frye as "an ironic . . . and urbane treatment of religio-literary cliches."\(^3\)

Despite the fact that it contains some of Stevens' most frequently quoted passages, many critics have expressed dissatisfaction with the poem's formal pattern. They find it uneven, obscure, discursive. Such critics have been looking, as Helen Vendler has suggested, "for a direct testament to Stevens' own feelings about the great questions of war, suffering, skepticism and death,"\(^4\) and have encountered instead an elaborately ironic treatment of the
subject, a treatment achieved through a highly condensed process of statement and contradiction or statement and qualification. It is not surprising, in the light of their expectations, that the very critics who find the poem unstructured disagree radically as to which portions of it are successful and which are not. Such criticism is based, I suspect, upon which cantos fit in with the authors' own notions of "acceptable" ways to broach the subject. Here are a few examples of this sort of critical dissent:

**Canto VI**

**Daniel Fuchs:** When Stevens writes of the sun . . . the personification is not convincing as an illustration of universal imperfections. The rest of the canto, the least successful of the poem, pursues even more strained comparisons.5

**Helen Vendler:** . . . the most original is one where Stevens tells an indulgent parable of the yellow sun and its parasitic bird, both insatiable. . . . Stevens' philosophic interests, which could lead him into miasmas of abstraction, are both tamed and freshened by the simplicities of the tale.6

**Canto VII**

**Helen Vendler:** The canto begins with a self-conscious, repellant "devotional" conceit. . . . and goes on progressively obscuring its denotation by repetition and interweaving, by uneasy logic, and by another berceuse transatlantique. . . . It is a betrayal of Stevens' most ambitious aesthetic.7

**Merle E. Brown:** In the seventh section, the loveliest of the entire poem, Stevens . . . rescues the rose from nature and makes it a symbol of the beauty and value of sacrifice and
suffering . . . There is nothing easy
or sentimental about this glorification
of human death . . .

In these passages the critics seem to assume that Stevens is
proposing an idea in each stanza which must be accepted or rejected
on its own merit just as it is originally presented. They have
ignored the operative force of irony within the canto as it modifies,
qualifies, or even remodels the basic idea--or simply cancels it
out. Just as important, they have ignored the complex connections
produced by the position of the canto in a long process of exploration
of a central theme, each part of which makes ironic comment on those
parts which precede or succeed it. The aim of this paper, then, is
to describe the function of irony within the poem, a function which,
in my view, is the cohesive element of the entire work.
I shall try to do something for you between now and early August. The fact is that I finished your last number of Kenyon Review an evening or two ago . . . What particularly interested me was the letter from one of your correspondents about the relation between what he called poetry and pain. Whatever he may mean, it might be interesting to try to do an esthétique du mal. It is the kind of idea that is difficult to shake off. Perhaps that would be my subject in one form or another.  

The letter from "one of your correspondents" mentioned by Stevens was written by a young soldier posted overseas; Ransom quoted it in an article of his own titled "Artists, Soldiers, Positivists." The tone of the letter is combative, cocky, strident, and the author seems impressed with himself as "a man of the hour." He asks:

What are we after in poetry? Or more exactly, what are we attempting to rout? The commandos of contemporary literature are having little to do with Eliot and even poets of charming distemper like Wallace Stevens (for whom we all developed considerable passion). Not necessarily a poetry of time and place, either. The question of poetry as in life (and in the Army) is one of survival, simply. . . . I find the poetry in Kenyon Review lamentable in many ways because it is cut off from pain. It is intellectual and it is fine, but it never reveals muscle and nerve. . . . I'm waiting for an American poem of the forties called "The Quip at the Heart of the Debacle." Not magnificent in its "orchestration of themes," Ransom! Dialectics and self-appointed emendators of the poem will have to go by the
board. The condition for approach to the poem will be baptism by fire. I believe there are minds and emotions ripe for that poem. Will they be found in the editors and readers of the Review?10

The letter amused Stevens. He shows this in his own satiric phrases in reference to the letter-writer: "what he called poetry"; "whatever he may mean." It also evoked a rapid response. Stevens mailed the manuscript of "Esthétique du Mal" to Kenyon Review just six weeks after describing to Ransom his plan for writing it.

The long poem does indeed concentrate on the subject of pain, the very reality from which the young soldier complained that intellectual poetry isolated itself. What's more, it includes a consideration of evil as an integral part of the same subject. However, the poem is without apology an "orchestration of themes" containing numerous passages of dialectic which invite the emendator. By choosing to pursue so complex and inclusive a process instead of dealing directly with the problem of survival amid the specialized brutalities of the war in progress, Stevens seems to be following a course in deliberate opposition to the one suggested by the young soldier, if he considered this advice again at all.

Nonetheless, he was aware of the general wartime prejudice against anything in the slightest effete, "arty," or esoteric. In a second letter to Ransom, dated July 28, 1944 and mailed to him with the finished manuscript, Stevens wrote:

The title is not quite right in the sense that anything of that sort seems to be not quite right now-a-days, but it is better than any substitute that I have been able to think
of . . . And just one thing more: I am thinking of aesthetics as the equivalent of aperçus, which seems to have been the original meaning. I don't know what would happen if anyone tried to systematize the subject, but I haven't tried.11

In general, Stevens found titles a superb source of irony. Ones that come to mind are "No Possum, No Sop, No Taters," "The Emperor of Ice-Cream," "Le Monocle de Mon Oncle," "Poems of Our Climate," "Anything is Beautiful If You Say It Is," "Lebensweisheitspielerei," and "Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour." All contrast in tone with the body of the poems to which they are attached and provide oblique commentaries on the poems themselves. Of the title, "Esthétique du Mal," Henry W. Wells says:

As with so many poems of eminently serious content, the title carries a touch of self-satire and even frivolity. The practice serves as a shield to discourage the sentimentalist . . . It is also a spell to ward off pomposity.12

Using French instead of English is part of the process of creating "a shield" and "a spell." Stevens became interested in French culture during his undergraduate days at Harvard. Robert Buttel says that he found it "a means of introducing details into his work that were exotic, elegant, and . . . fresh."13 He adds:

. . . Stevens had his own ear for language, a fine sensibility for choosing words and phrases that almost breathe with their effects. . . . when the English language failed him, he did not hesitate to appropriate a French word for its sound and its penumbra of meaning and emotion.14

Part of the "penumbra of meaning and emotion" involved in the use of French stems from the very act of translation, an act which inevitably transforms or recreates the idea. For example,
"esthétique" avoids all of the flat-footed, academic connotations of the English equivalent, "aesthetics." Moreover, "mal" is a word so generalized in meaning, it can contain the concept of evil, as well as of suffering and illness (in fact all aspects of human misfortune) in one word, thus reinforcing the primary thesis of the poem: that evil and pain are simply different aspects of one overriding reality -- our inescapable mortality. By this simple shift from English to French, Stevens eliminates the layers of Puritan guilt associated with the word "evil" and the suffocating Victorian sentiment associated with the words "suffering" or "pain," thereby permitting himself a cultivated objectivity in dealing with both, which he regards as parts of a single subject.

Joseph N. Riddel suggests that the title could possibly have been derived from Baudelaire's Les Fleurs du Mal and his Curiosité esthétique, but warns us not to see Baudelaire's work as a key to the poem. I would go a step further: if Stevens did have Baudelaire's titles in mind as he evolved his own, he could have used them only as an ironic comment on the total irreconcilability of his own view of "mal" with that of Baudelaire. One has only to read the last eight lines of Canto IV or the last twelve of Canto XV to be convinced of this. Baudelaire is surely "the genius of misfortune" who blackens everything with his black vision, whereas Stevens ends his explorations with an aperçu of an earthly paradise, a world of amassing harmony, "swarming with the metaphysical changes that occur / Merely in living as and where we live."
In any case, close scrutiny of the title posts warning of what is to follow. No exceptional perspicacity is required to see that Stevens' poetry abhors the lazy reader.
III
THE RHETORIC OF IRONY

The ironic process in this poem originates, as it does in all of Stevens' poetry, in the rhetorical devices which are scattered in profusion throughout his verse. These devices fall into four main categories: veiled allusion, parody, intentional ambiguity and satiric shifts of diction and tone. Their total effect is one of extreme condensation, yet at the same time, they move beyond the poem to a wide frame of reference. Stevens' use of these devices is idiosyncratic, requiring not only close scrutiny but considerable ingenuity from the reader. For that reason, it seemed to me a good idea to examine the way some of these devices are used in "Esthétique."

Stevens sometimes alludes to persons or places directly. He identifies the volcano which the meditative man observes in Canto I as Vesuvius. In Canto XIV, Victor Serge, author of The Case of Comrade Tulayev, an expose of the Communist purges in the thirties, speaks in the first person, referring by name to Konstantinov, the Marxist leader in charge of those purges. Such identification is infrequent. Far more often, Stevens prefers to suggest an allusion more obliquely so that the reader is teased a bit about his actual intention. Often these veiled allusions suggest two, three or more possibilities.
One of the simpler examples of veiled allusion appears in Canto I, the "paragraphs on the sublime," which suggests Longinus' essay but does not limit itself to this identification. Still, the possibility that it is intended makes ironic reference first to the vagueness of the meditative man's understanding of his endeavors, and second, to the mystery of the true authorship and origins of the essay attributed to Longinus.

A more complicated allusion appears in Canto III when Stevens describes a poet's "firm stanzas" hanging "like hives in hell," and goes on to suggest that those hives have been abandoned, since hell, like heaven, was moved to earth when man gave up his belief in religious myth. If Stevens intends the reader to associate the poet with Dante, the reference evokes the Inferno's famous passage in Canto III which Eliot quoted in part in "The Wasteland."

```
edietro le venia si lunga tratta
di gente, ch' io non averei creduto
che morte tanta n'avesse disfatta... . . .
Questi sciaurati, che mai non fur vivi,
erano ignudi, stimolati molto
da mosconi e da vespe ch'eran ivi.
```

(Inferno, III, 55-57 and 64-67)

The stinging wasps and hornets were instruments of hell's punishment of the faithless and the uncommitted, a metaphor for Dante's own verses which were designed to sting the conscience of his readers, as he explained himself in his Letter to Can Grande.

Later in Canto III of "Esthétique" Stevens speaks of our preference for earthly paradise instead of an imagined heaven and hell.
It seems as if the honey of common summer
Might be enough, as if the golden combs
Were part of a sustenance itself enough.

The suggestion that the "firm" hives of hell produced stinging reprimands while the hives "of common summer" produce "golden combs" compounds the irony of the allusion.

The "firm hives in hell" may also be an allusion to Milton's Paradise Lost, specifically these lines describing Satan's hosts in Pandemonium.

All access was thronged, the gates
And porches wide, but chief the spacious hall . . .
Thick swarmed, both on the ground and in the air,
Brushed with the hiss of rustling wings. As bees
In springtime, when the sun with Taurus rides,
Pour forth their populous youth about the hive
In clusters:

(Paradise Lost, I, 761-2 and 767-71)

In the context both allusions are valid and Stevens probably intended his reader to consider both possibilities.

Canto IV contains a concentration of allusions, one of which is particularly interesting. The passage opens with two lines which mock the sentimentalist who collects all sorts of flowers without discrimination. Then it asks:

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

These lines comprise a remarkable rendering of the process of musical
composition, but the Musician B. turns the description into an amusing bit of irony. We are certainly to think of the great trio here, Bach, Beethoven and Brahms. Yet, since B. is unidentified, what is to prevent our adding Berlioz, Bartok, Brittain, Barber, Berlin, Borodin and Bizet? B. is whatever musician one prefers, a multiplicity of musicians, and the possibilities are a playful mockery of the Livre de Toutes Sortes de Fleurs d'après Nature. All sorts of musicians play all sorts of notes, but in the process, one man, one B., orders many notes around one keynote that is the single sound of his creation.

Later in the same canto there is an allusion to "the genius of misfortune," who is surely Baudelaire, but again is not identified. The musician B. and the Spaniard of the rose described in the lines that follow, are artists who make order out of the chaos of experience by arranging it around a center which "exists in their own especial eye." The eye, of course, is a pun,—both their seeing eye and the personality "I." But the genius of misfortune, a B. gone astray, makes the whole universe partake of evil and pain because that is his one "note." He does not use it as a center around which to order the multiplicity of experience, but "makes fault fall out on everything." Stevens, when he wrote these lines, may have had in mind these two stanzas from Baudelaire's "L'Héautontimorouménos."

Ne suis-je un faux accord  
Dans la divine symphonie,  
Grâce à la vorace Ironie  
Qui me secoue et qui me mord!
Elle est dans ma voix, la criarde!
C'est tout mon sang, ce poison noir!
Je suis le sinistre miroir
Où la mègère regarde.

Parody works in the poem in much the same way as veiled allusion. It is half-suggested, but its presence reënforces the ironic counter-statement of the cantos in which it appears. For instance, in Canto II, the lines which explain the poet's situation, by their very brevity and flat-footed tone, lightly parody the ecstatic agony of "Ode to a Nightingale." The acacias represent the whole of Keat's lush stanza 5. The simple lines, "Warblings became / Too dark, too far, too much the accents of / Afflicted sleep" paraphrase the ode's elaborate close:

Adieu! Adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
In the next valley glades:
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
Fled is that music: --Do I wake or sleep?

In the perfumed night, Keats tried to identify the song of the nightingale, a metaphor for the spirit of poesie itself, with his own despair. His long ode brings in all of the decorative imagery at his command to effect this union, but the bird eludes him. The recollection that even so perfect an attempt was useless strengthens Stevens' statement that pain "in / Its own hallucination never sees / How that which rejects it saves it in the end." Just because the spirit of poesie is immortal, because "no hungry generations" tread it down, it can lift us momentarily beyond suffering and reconcile us to death; in essence Keats' failure was his triumph. Without the
"Ode" in mind, the passage loses much of its effectiveness.

The Spaniard of the rose in Canto IV has caused critics much concern; he has been thought to represent the Spanish poet, Gongora, Baudelaire's Don Juan from "Don Juan en Enfers," William Carlos Williams, and Picasso among others. Of late, critics seem most inclined to accept Samuel French Morse's statement that he is Senor Pedro Dot, a hybridizer of roses. In any case, he is a metaphor for the artist who discovers a possible order in the multiplicity of nature. What has often been overlooked in concern about his identity is a passing reference to Pope's "Essay on Criticism" which contains these lines:

Then Criticism the Muse's handmaid prov'd
To dress her charms, and make her more belov'd:
But following wits from that intention stray'd,
Who could not win the mistress, woo'd the maid.

Stevens parodies the poem for one line only, but it is enough to make his point. He describes the Spaniard of the rose rescuing that rose from nature and "making it exist in his own especial eye." Then he asks:

Can we conceive of him as rescuing less,
As muffing the mistress for her several maids,
As foregoing the nakedest passion for barefoot Philandering? . . .

"Muffing," "mistress" and "maids" echo the careful alliteration of Pope's line and the total metrical collapse of "barefoot / Philandering" makes a humorous comment on unordered inclusiveness, especially in contrast to Pope's measured verse.

The final example of parody which I have discovered in
"Esthétique du Mal" is a complex one, contained in the controversial Canto VII. This canto, an elegy in unrhymed quatrains, opens with the line, "How red the rose that is the soldier's wound." It suggests the lines from *The Ruba'iyat of Omar Khayyam*,

I sometimes think that never blows so red.  
The rose as where some buried Caesar bled:

(Ed. l. xviii)

The echo is intended, undoubtedly, as an antithesis to the wracked poetry of World War I which is Stevens' main concern here. He is thinking, I believe, especially of Wilfred Owen's "Greater Love." This poem was written early in the war before Owen had begun to feed exclusively on his own bitterness, and it still questions why God should let innocent men die young to no purpose. It begins,

Red lips are not so red  
As the stained stones kissed by the English dead.  
Kindness of wooed and wooer  
Seems shame to their love pure.  
O love, your eyes lose lure  
When I behold eyes blinded in my stead!

The second and the fourth stanzas of "Greater Love" are pertinent, too.

Your slender attitude  
Trembles not exquisite like limbs knife-skewed,  
Rolling and rolling there  
Where God seems not to care;  
Till the fierce love they bear  
Cramps them in death's extreme decrepitude.

Heart, you were never hot  
Nor large, nor full like hearts made great with shot;  
And though your hand be pale,  
Paler are all which trail  
Your cross through flame and hail:  
Weep, you may weep, for you may touch them not.
This contrasts with the summer sleep of Stevens' soldier who is at ease on his mountain because there is no question of being forgotten by God. Soothed by the mourning woman, he has become the "surrogate or secularized martyr to man's fate." Read in association with "Greater Love," the Stevens poem seems a consciously intended catharsis for Owen's unresolved anger.

The irony works in the most curious, the most daring way in this canto. That it can be an imitation so similar in sensitivity to the poem it imitates, so compassionate, so deeply human and yet, instead of damning the inanity of war or lamenting the tragedy of a soldier's personal sacrifice, can parody its model by suggesting that human death, a soldier's red death, is part of life's happiness, is a remarkable endeavor. It becomes not only an acceptable, but a brilliant one, in its association with the theme of "redness" which will be discussed later in this essay.

No one has described Stevens' use of intentional ambiguity more succinctly than R. P. Blackmur.

Mr. Stevens associates two or more . . . observations so as to accent their ambiguities. But what is ambiguous in the association is not the same as in the things associated; it is something new, and it has the air of something condensed. This is the quality that makes the poems seem to grow, rise in the mind like a tide, the poetry cannot be exhausted, because the words that make them, intentionally ambiguous at their crucial points, are themselves inexhaustible.

Frequent instances of this sort of intentional ambiguity are scattered through "Esthétique du Mal," contributing simultaneously to its condensation and to its enlargement in widening circles of
association. A few examples will serve to suggest the way in which these ambiguities enrich the various cantos.

"O terra infidel" in Canto III could be an invocation to the earth, faithless in its indifference either to our suffering or to our need for the supernatural. In this sense, terra would include a pun on the word terror. Since the word is compounded of Latin and English, terra could also be used here as a nominative adjective modifying the English noun, infidel, earth's infidel which is modern man. The interchangeability of meaning suggests the close association of man with his physical world, in sharp contrast with his relationship to heaven and to hell, both of which have ceased to have meaning in his mind.

"At dawn / The paratroopers fall and as they fall / They mow the lawn" in Canto XI seems at first a bit of forced absurdity until the image of real paratroopers dropping out of the sky to mow down civilians with machine guns suddenly blots out the absurdity. The civilized, methodical savagery of this idea is the experienced reality of our own time, far more bizarre than any fantasy we could invent. The crux of the irony is the verb "mow" which has, at once, such harmless and such savage connotations. Stevens allows both to operate, creating a third meaning, a sort of gratuitous horror.

"Life is a bitter aspic" in the same canto compares life to a gelatinous, cold salad (not the nourishing hot meat one might like to imagine) and to a bitter asp's fang which is potentially lethal. The two ideas combine to suggest that the most dangerous evil lurks in
what seems most bland, most innocuous.

"The confected ocean" a few lines further on pictures an ocean which is an artifact, a thing constructed, not real. In conjunction with the reference to pink weather in the next line, it suggests cotton candy, a metaphor for second-rate art which is a cloying nothingness, despite its flamboyant color and impressive bulk.

Satiric playfulness and surprise are evident everywhere in the poem in the outrageous juxtaposition of ideas and startling combinations of everyday and esoteric words, just as they are in all of Stevens' poetry. The sudden shifts in diction and tone specifically ward off the possibility of pomposity or excessive seriousness, in my view, and set up a protective shield of objectivity about both poet and poem. Yet this playfulness never becomes facetiousness. As R. P. Blackmur says of Stevens' poetry in general, "the light tone increases the gravity of substance, and an atmosphere of wit and elegance assures poignancy of meaning." The full effect of these shifts is difficult to extract from the context, but I shall try to give a few examples of them.

In Canto I the sudden shift both in diction and tone from rhetoric on the sublime, the description of "pain killing pain on the very point of pain" and the volcano trembling like a body "at the end of life" to "it was almost time for lunch" is a humorous illustration of the way mundane bodily needs intrude on one's loftiest meditations, confirming the very serious truth that man is always "this unalterable animal" whose efforts are always subject to the
limitations of his mortality.

In Canto V, there is another such shift, almost constituting burlesque, from the touching intimacy of shared personal sorrow to the memory of old ritual mourning which is indicated in "the ai-ai of parades." "Ai-ai" suggests public grief, the tearing of hair and beating of breast traditional in the mourning of ancient cults, as well as the "aye-aye" of obedience to protocol and custom. It is laughable but also discomforting in the face of "the nebulous brilliances in the smallest look / Of beings deepest darling." The word "parades" confirms the image of public, planned grief, and also carries the connotation of parading one's sorrow or making a show of it.

Pauses are sometimes used by Stevens to make a comic contrast. This one in Canto VIII reduces a solemn drama to a farce.

The death of Satan was a tragedy [ end line pause ]
For the imagination.

It prepares the reader for Satan's death, not in "Julian thunder-cloud" but in a tenement. The very word "tenement" suggests an insignificant environment, a slum, completely unsuited to Satan's majesty. It also, by definition, denotes an abode which is rented, a temporary residence belonging to someone else. He had no claim to residence through ownership even in the slum; he was only there because we suffered him to be so by imagining him to be there.

The final canto, on which so much depends, pauses in its closing statement to present an amusing tableau of nonphysical souls in a
nonphysical paradise, leaning out of that paradise to observe with envy the green corn of earth gleaming beneath them. It is reminiscent of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's blessed damozel who "leaned out / from the golden bar of heaven" and longed for her earthly lover. Stevens' metaphysics are described as "sprawling in majors of August heat," done in, as it were, by the force of nature and by "the rotund emotions" of physical reality. The effect of this passage is to satirize the pallid ineffectiveness of myths of heaven where languid, bodiless figures, rather bored, sit about with nothing to do but wish they were alive again, on earth. Breaking across the very condensed closing canto of the poem, this satiric image is a talisman against too much solemnity, and against assuming that we shall ever eliminate the ironic contradictions, not only of living, but of our concepts of death.

So far, this essay has concentrated upon definition of the very individual ways in which Stevens employs the rhetoric of irony. The next chapter will take up the ironic process which this rhetoric sets in motion.
IV

THE IRONIC PROCESS IN ACTION

One of the primary problems of discovering an orderly process in "Esthétique du Mal" stems from the difficulty of identifying the figures who are introduced in the various cantos and are referred to simply as "he." Most critics assume that the figure in Canto I, the meditative man who contemplates Vesuvius, is also the "he" of Canto II who writes elegiac poetry. Some also see him as the "he" who hangs "his hives" of poetry in hell in Canto III.

No one, to my knowledge, has suggested that Stevens has in mind the meditative man of Canto I in Canto X or Canto XII, in both of which new persons are introduced, again referred to simply as "he." The man of Canto X has been identified as Renoir, or as a Renoir-like figure; the man of Canto XII has not been identified by anyone, so far as I know, but is an isolated, dehumanized dialectician, quite different from the meditative man of Canto I. The rest of the cantos make no mention of this man at all, except in a reflective reference to him in Canto XIII. The usual explanation given is that Stevens used him to open the poem, continued use of him for a canto or two and then "dropped him."

Robert Pack compares the so-called protagonist of "Esthétique" to the woman of "Sunday Morning."

... they are both concerned first with pleasure,
... and yet, in comfort, the man's thought focus
upon images of pain, as those of the woman turned to thoughts of death. Stevens makes the same use of the man in this poem as of the woman in the earlier one; they are figures through whom he can express his own meditations and whom he can use as part of the dialectic of his own thinking.19

The difficulty inherent in this comparison is that the meditative man is just one of a variety of figures in "Esthétique" who are searching for an adequate aesthetic of pain and evil with varying degrees of success or lack of success, all of whom could be compared equally well with the woman enjoying the complacencies of the peignoir. Nor is there any more reason to assume the "he" of Canto I is the "he" of Canto II or Canto III than that he is the same "he" of the later cantos. The most reasonable assumption, to my mind, is that there is not one protagonist who is dropped early in the poem, but a series of protagonists or proponents of the various approaches to evil and pain which are explored in the separate cantos.

If one accepts the idea of separate proponents in each canto, they can be identified as follows:

Canto I The meditative man reading his book on the sublime
Canto II The Keatsian poet who finds an elegy in space
Canto III The Dantesque or Miltonic poet whose hives hang in hell
Canto IV The Genius of Misfortune who is contrasted to the sentimentalist
Canto V The true sympathizers, a circle of kinfolk
Canto VI The big bird, a symbol of the questing mind in pursuit of impossible perfections
Canto VII The soldier of the rose
Canto VIII The shaken realists who denied Satan
Canto IX The princes of the proverbs of pure poverty who
lost the folly of the moon
Canto X The man whose anima liked his animal unsubjugated
Canto XI The man of bitter appetite
Canto XII The categorical dialectician
Canto XIII The Calvinist who, like the meditative man, wishes
to blame secondary characters for evil and pain,
instead of the true assassin.
Canto XIV Konstantinov, the lunatic of one idea
Canto XV The singer of the right chorale.

Once the fifteen proponents have been identified, a process begins to
distribute which is repeated in each canto. Each proponent presents or
exemplifies directly or indirectly an approach to the problem of
evil and pain. Each approach is described (there is considerable
variation in the way this is done, of course) and then each approach
is qualified, transformed, or nullified through ironic cross-
examination generated within the canto itself by means of allusion,
parody, ambiguity or satiric shifts of diction and tone.

Unfortunately, it is one thing to describe such a process at
work in so difficult a poem, and quite another thing to illustrate
that process in action. If my thesis is to be convincing, the
process must be shown to work throughout the poem by means of a
schematic outline. This outline, which has been condensed as much
as possible, should be read with the understanding that it represents
my own interpretation of the poem, not a consensus of critical
opinion. Even after three decades, critical opinion is too diverse
to arrive at any such consensus. In the left column are listed the
approaches toward evil and pain examined in each canto. In the right
column are the qualifying statements produced by the effect of irony
functioning within each canto. The qualifying statements vary from
strong negations of the proposed approach to subtle revisions of its
original content.

Canto I

A meditative man in pleasant
surroundings attempts to
describe the holocaust of
Vesuvius in his letters home,
seeking the right rhetoric in
a book on the sublime. He
believes he can achieve a
"correct catastrophe" in his
recreation of the ancient
terror.

This man describes the volcano
in false terms by conceiving of
it as the author of human suffer-
ing. The volcano felt nothing
when it destroyed Pompeii. Nature
is entirely indifferent to our
vulnerable mortality, though we
shrink from acknowledging this.

Canto II

A Keatsian poet, lying on a
balcony at night, half asleep,
listens to bird-song that, in
time, communicates his despair
through an elegy he finds in

The poet's pain, virtually person-
ified in this canto, is indifferent
to the supremacy of nature and to
the products of the imagination.
The pain wants to believe
space. The elegy is not achieved through meditation, but through a flight of imagination. The imagination, like the moon and the night, is part of a supremacy which is free of the poet and his pain.

that its suffering is shared by the sky, by all of nature, and by the imagination, too, not realizing that just because imagination is free, it provides our truest solace—it can describe earthly beauty untouched by the pathetic fallacy, and so free us momentarily from suffering.

Canto III

Firm stanzas of the great religious poet (Dante and Milton are suggested, not identified) hang like hives in hell. These stanzas once nourished man with fictions of an over-human God and a Satan who made of pain a sort of mimicry.

Because we cannot bear the pity of the over-human God anymore, we have moved heaven and hell down to earth. The hives of the religious poet's verse hang here on earth now, but we prefer to think that the "honey of common summer" will be enough to sustain us. We don't need the too-parental God, and we prefer, if we must bear pain, to bear it simply as pain, not as God's punishment.

Canto IV

(This canto has a double action.)

The sentimentalist includes The true artist (exemplified by
The Genius of Misfortune, a Baudelairean figure, focuses on one thing, evil and pain, one keynote which has become the heart of all his creative effort. In this sense he is a more serious artist than the sentimentalist.

The true sympathizers, one's kin, can touch one in moments of bereavement and pain, because, having discarded the trappings of religion and myth, in the total honesty of sorrow, they accept the fact that all men are helpless in the face of their own mortality. In other words, they

the Musician B and the Spaniard of the rose) focuses on one particular, and relates all diversity to this view "of his especial eye,"

This man has so absorbed himself in misfortune, he no longer discriminates between the world of the mind and the world of the body. As a result, he makes fault fall out on everything, involving himself in false engagements of the mind.

Canto V

Paradoxically, when such sympathizers accept their human helplessness, their loving intimacy (in-bar) assumes the attributes (the flower and the fire of the festivals) with which man once vested "the golden forms" of his religion (ex-bar). Thus, by reconciling himself to the loss of "the phantoms" of ritualized faith, man
do not try to disguise their sympathy with false solace. regains what he has lost, at least in part, through the "nebulous brilliancies" of simple compassion for those he loves.

Canto VI

The sun, like a clown, attempts perfection, and fails over and over. A big bird (the searching mind) keeps gobbling at the sun for food, improving its appetite, becoming less gross, yet never really refining its taste. The bird is misled for, so long as the sun keeps promising unrealized perfections, he disdains each astringent ripening of red fruit which the sun has managed to accomplish. This fruit is tart because, being part of the imperfect universe, it includes pain and evil as well as happiness. Yet it would gratify a discriminating appetite.

Canto VII

(This canto has a double action, one stated, one implied.)
The dead soldier sleeps in peace, surrounded by his fellows, soothed by the mourning woman's stroke.
The images, verse form, diction and tone suggest war verse protesting the futility The soldier sleeps in peace because he valued life, and was indifferent to death except as a part of life. Yet the poem takes a position diametrically opposed to those sentiments. All "cocks crow us up
and waste of war and the tragedy of the soldier's death.

to die." Death is only tragedy when we fail to see that it is an inevitable part of life.

Canto VIII

The modern realists denied Satan, causing his ignominious death. This in turn created new "filial revenges" since man became responsible for his own evil. Moreover, the shaken realists found reality empty without the gods. Tragedy was gone.

Tragedy may be beginning all over again, as the imagination makes a new start, creating new fictions to replace the gods, stirred by a passion for "yes" that "underlies every no that is spoken."

Canto IX

The moon, directly addressed as "Effendi," is panicked because he can no longer offer man, now a realist, "the phosphored fruits" of myth and imagination. Man has lost his sensibility.

A new chant, "a primitive ecstasy," is welling up in man's mind to fill up the emptiness of "the sky divested of its fountains." This "loud, large water" bubbling up in the night suggests to this reader the raw energy of modern art and music, of Picasso, Roualt and Stravinsky.
The modern artist, a figure suggesting Renoir, rejects his old muse, "the mauve maman," for a fecund, gross primitive female in an attempt to rediscover a savage severity, reality itself, not fiction, not myth.

The new muse disentangles him from "sleek enсолacings," but involves him in a new nostalgia, "reality explained." To face the truth of his mortality would be a sort of innocence, if life itself were innocent, but it is not. He just pretends it is, which is as false as the old nostalgias.

Canto X

Life is, in fact, a "bitter aspic." Calamity, brutality, dishonesty, loss are all part of it. Our only protection is "the gaiety of language," the constructions of the imagination which can give to reality order, humor, beauty.

The real artist, "the man of bitter appetite," does not try to turn reality into false pink confections; he learns to be a connoisseur of bitterness, an epicure of pain. (He cultivates a taste for the astringent red fruit which the big bird disdained.)

Canto XI

The dialectician, thinking he can divide the world into categories and choose the sort

Actually, the calculating dialectician is in neither world; in his categorical efforts, he knows
of world he wants, doesn't realize that if he divides the world into a world of people and a world of himself, the two would overlap. He would know the world of people through knowing himself, and vice versa. Isolation is impossible in human experience.

Canto XIII

The Calvinist may explain pain and evil as each man paying for other men's guilt, just as the meditative man may explain pain and evil as the inherent cruelty of nature, but such considerations are entirely secondary. The major tragedy is the fact that we are "unalterable animals," born to die. Our lives are much happier when we see this truthfully and know death "unperplexed as the happiest enemy." This we can accept with "the politest helplessness," feeling the assassin working in our own blood.

Canto XIV

The political theorist would like to make life logical by pursuing one idea, making the neither himself nor others. Living without knowledge, he lives without pain in a third world. This third world is cold and meaningless, without suffering but also without love.

This theorist does not see that nature's indifference to his logic, together with the inexorable mastery
politics of emotion seem an intellectual structure, wanting all men to live, suffer and die within that structure.

of our own mortality, makes his logic nonsense.

Canto XV

Having posed and disposed of the other possibilities, one learns at last that the greatest deprivation is not to live in the physical world. Souls exiled in paradise, could they look down on earth, would envy "our green corn gleaming" in a paradise unknown to them.

The totality of earthly paradise is still unknown to us, too. "Adventurers in humanity" have never conceived of "a race completely physical in a physical world." We have never wholly accepted the concept that man is "unalterable animal," yet this is the only valid esthétique du mal, given the realities of our situation.

The ironic process illustrated in this analysis of the argument within each canto is accompanied by a second process, also ironic, which grows out of the implied commentary of each canto upon the others in the series. The first process may be viewed as a horizontal one, moving from statement to revised statement or counter-statement in a repeated linear development. The second process, which is much harder to tabulate because it poses the possibility of almost endless
proliferation, may be compared to the rings which move out, one after another, around the point at which a stone is dropped into water.

Because the second process is so open-ended, instead of forcing the reader through a second lengthy schematization, I have selected examples of the process in action, trying to find illustrations which illustrate varying degrees of complexity.

Cantos I and V

The meditative man of Canto I is isolated from close human contact in a foreign hotel. He is trying to explain in "letters home" that nature is the source of all our pain. His isolation and failure is re-emphasized by Canto V which explains that meaningful words can be spoken only by communal beings who share together through look and touch their acceptance of nature's indifference and their own humanity.

Cantos III, V and XV

In Canto III, our myths of "golden presences" are negated because they were created as a basis for a heaven and hell which no longer exists for us. Paradoxically, in Canto V, we discover attributes of our old awe and wonder in acceptance of our mortality. In other words, we find attributes of the lost splendors when we acknowledge that myth is meaningless and only our humanity is meaningful. Canto XV carries the premise a step further by stating that
when we fully accept our physical identity in a purely physical world we shall be able to make metaphysical hymns to the myriad relationships of our earthly paradise as satisfying as were once the old hymns to vanished deities. In other words, when we acknowledge intellectually the truths that we understand emotionally in relations of close kinship, we shall be able to go beyond the small circle of personal involvement to comprehend the swarming, various world beyond subjective experience.

Canto V and VI

Canto V describes a group of human beings brought together by sorrow, beings who have suspended their search for an imagined perfection in a supernatural world. It is "Stevens' personal appeal . . . for unity within reality, within the actual, within what we have made, discarding 'clouds, benevolences, distant heads' of religion, guilt and sin."20 The introduction of the parable in Canto VI, with its restless mind pursuing unattainable perfections while it discards the bitter-sweet fruits of human reality, defines the threat to that "unity within reality," since each man, though he can be moved to emotional communion through personal relationships, is at the same time the possessor of that restless human mind. It not only sends him on false quests, but in his frustration at repeated failure, isolates
him from his fellow man.

Cantos III, VI and VII

These three cantos are joined together by the theme of "redness" which is equated with physical reality. In Canto III, a figure who must be Jesus ("the reddest lord" who has "gone before us in experience," became flesh and died for us) pities us too much for us to bear. We prefer "the health of the world" to the self-pity he engenders in us. In Canto VI, the big bird, man's mind eager for perfection, in its faulty taste, overlooks "the point of redness" and disdains "each astringent ripening," that is, he overlooks the red (physically real) fruit, the bitter apple of the Tree of Knowledge, yet, ironically, the "health of the world" on which he could feed and flourish. In Canto VII the soldier's wound is blood red, a symbol of suffering, but it is also a rose, a symbol of man's humanity. The sacrifice of the soldier does not oppress us like the sacrifice of Jesus, the God become too-human, nor like the mind made inhuman by misguided search. The redness of the wound becomes a symbol of life that is good, not of death. Through the soldier, grown "deathless in great size," we accept death without the self-pity of Canto III or the vain attempts to transcend the physical imperfection of mortality in Canto VI. Riddel comments, "Stevens' hero . . . does not
transcend human evil but solemnizes its necessity."

Cantos III, VII and XV

Canto III would be set in inferno, if inferno were not here on earth now. The poet of the canto originally hung his firm hives in hell. The soldier of Canto VII finds deathless rest on a mountain which strongly suggests Dante's mountain of Purgatorio. On the summit of Dante's mountain is the Garden of Eden or Earthly Paradise, a place from which, once attained, the souls ascend to heaven. The shades of Purgatorio are not at ease because they are passionately striving to reach the summit and make their ascension. Stevens' soldier sleeps at ease on the mountain because his life is over. He expects admittance nowhere else, neither to heaven nor to hell. He does not seek what Stevens calls "the deeper death." Canto XV describes the "paradise unknown" which, through "the right chorale" of poetry, we shall one day achieve. Achievement depends on accepting our totally physical being in a totally physical world. We shall find our paradise, in essence, by reversing the quest of The Comedy and returning to earth from supernatural exploration. Paradoxically, we can still create a purgatory for ourselves by imagining that we must seek entry to some supernatural world after death, but if we do not, death can become simply easeful sleep. A return to religious
myth would return us to hell. Man in Dante's theology moves from purgatory to paradise by erasing the sins of earth, including the sin of the fruit of Eden. Man makes the same progress in Stevens' poem by discarding the bondage of myth, by renouncing futile search for perfection, and by cultivating a taste for the bitter red fruit of reality, which may well be the self-same fatal apple. The ironies engendered by the hell, purgatory and paradise associations of these three cantos reach out to encompass the entire poem.
Many critics object to the ending of "Esthétique du Mal," despite its brilliance, on the ground that it is inconclusive. This comment by Joseph Riddel is typical:

"Esthétique du Mal" is one of the poems which, to apply that striking proposition from "Man Carrying Thing" (CP 350), "resist[s] the intelligence" almost too successfully. It is unwieldy, intense but provisional, the compactness of the argument suggesting a thoroughness which is not altogether realized.22

What bothers Riddel, and others who are in agreement with him, is that, in Canto XV, Stevens does not suspend the ironic process during the statement of his conclusion to permit himself the triumph of an unchallenged resolution. Instead he proposes an aesthetic which he then describes only as a possibility, not as an achieved substitute for the false nostalgias which he has examined in the earlier cantos.

His thought proceeds as follows:

1. The greatest poverty is not to live in a physical world, not to know the difference between despair and desire: that is, not to accept the simple truth that pain and evil, as well as happiness and good, are part of human experience in a physical world.

2. In our attempts to find a metaphysic which transcends pain and evil, we have never "conceived of a race / Completely physical in a physical world." Thus the only valid paradise
for us, earthly paradise, remains "paradise unknown."

3. Nevertheless, praise of earthly paradise is "the thesis scrivened in delight," "the right chorale," the correct aesthetic.

4. Yet who would think a "right chorale" could be made out of such incompatible ingredients, a paradise including evil and pain, a paradise demanding acceptance of our own helplessness and our own malevolence? "Who could have thought" to make all the metaphysic one needs of the changes that occur in the intricate flux of physical experience?

A curious sort of doubt is engendered toward the end, not about the definition of the right aesthetic, but about the likelihood of modern man's being able to confront his "paradise unknown," given the paradoxical necessity of including in it "all the ill" and "all the evil" of his actual existence. The doubt is created by the sudden change from positive statement, "This is the thesis scrivened in delight," to the tentative, almost timorous uncertainty of the next four lines.

One might have thought of sight, but who could think Of what it sees, for all the ill it sees? Speech found the ear, for all the evil sound, But the dark italics it could not propound.

In the concluding six lines, though the interrogatory tone continues, the speaker seems to be caught up in his vision of "paradise unknown" again, suddenly aware, after his period of doubt, of the riches to be found there.
And out of what one sees and hears and out
Of what one feels, who could have thought to make
So many selves, so many sensuous worlds,
As if the air, the mid-day air, was swarming
With the metaphysical changes that occur,
Merely in living as and where we live.

Helen Vendler, a perceptive critic, but one who sometimes
chooses to ignore Stevens' more fanciful ironies, ignores the abandon­
ment of the interrogatory tone in the close and lumps the last six
lines and the four preceding ones into a single statement. She
complains that the whole is

qualified praise of the present which . . . takes on not
a tone of sufficiency, but a note of plaintive acquiescence,
as, in phrases which keep canceling their predecessors, the
good is balanced off against the concessives to evil.23

But surely it is arbitrary to assume that the poet troubled to create
the subtle ironies of the earlier part of the poem just to let his
finale peter out in "plaintive acquiescence."

To my mind, Stevens introduces here the culminating irony of
the entire work by illustrating in lines 15 to 18 the inherent diffi­
culty of his aesthetic. It indicates how the modern artist, still
not wholly free of his reliance on the old "sleek ensolacings,"
almost succumbs to baffled silence when he is confronted with the
necessity of incorporating pain and evil into his concept of good.
Yet, even as he wavers, the "rotund emotions" of earthly paradise
overcome his doubt in lines 19 to 24 as he contemplates the possibility
of satisfying, through this aesthetic, all of man's longing for meta­
physics, rooted now, not in a fiction, but in reality.

The pattern of the various cantos, as this essay has tried to
illustrate, is to describe an approach to "mal" and then to destroy or modify it through irony. Here, in the last canto, the process almost repeats itself, but Stevens retrieves his "right chorale" by a hair's breadth. His conclusion is not acquiescent, but wry. Quite consciously, he has erected a shield of protective qualification about his emerging hymn to terra infidel, making it secure from pomposity or excessive optimism. Moreover, he insists here on an unidealized portrayal of the modern artist, who, having abandoned his old myths, approaches the physical world with some trepidation, until he is caught up again

In the yes of the realist spoken because he must
Say yes, spoken because under every no
Lay a passion for yes that has never been broken.

Yet, even as he begins his hymn to the "paradise unknown" which is his own home, if the tragedy of illusion is not to begin all over again, he must reconcile himself to the myriad contradictions of his universe since it is the ability to see the intrinsic irony of existence itself that, in Stevens' mind, makes happiness possible for the twentieth century skeptic, the man of bitter appetite. Thus the ironic process as it unfolds in "Esthétique du Mal" becomes more than a matter of design; it becomes the very substance of the poem's statement.

By tracing this process as it operates throughout the poem, this essay has endeavored to refute charges of some critics that the poem is "random" or "pretentious." Also, it has tried to establish the fact that criticisms, such as those quoted on page 4, which
interpret statements in the separate cantos as Stevens' own views on evil and pain, are misreadings of the poem.

Stevens' thesis is that man will be happy only when he accepts "the swarming metaphysical changes that occur, / Merely in living as and where we live,"--that is when he resists the temptation to resolve the inherent imperfections in his world by creating fictions, whether religious, philosophic, or political, which lead him to destroy the bitter-sweet satisfaction he can find in physical reality. To many readers this thesis seems disturbing because it does not take a moral stand on man's responsibility in regard to evil, but to take such a stand was not Stevens' intention.25

His true purpose was, to my mind, to define the nature of our relationship to reality, proving through the ironic process, canto by canto, that right understanding of this relationship is the only context in which moral judgments or judgments of any kind may be made if we are to avoid tragic self-delusion. From that point of view, the poem seems to me extraordinarily successful, brilliantly insightful and condensed to an incredible richness of texture.


7. Ibid., p. 209.


14. Ibid., p. 112.


16. Ibid., p. 209.


18. Ibid., p. 61.


22. Ibid., p. 215.

23. Vendler, p. 211.

24. Ibid., p. 206.

25. Both Helen Vendler and Joseph Riddel indicate this feeling in the quotations identified in footnotes 21 and 22. Charles Alexander also states this objection strongly in his article, "The Idea of Evil in Wallace Stevens' Poetry," identified in footnote 19.
BIBLIOGRAPHY
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Works:


Secondary Works:


VITA

Isota Tucker Epes