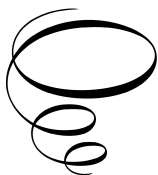


**Literary Nuances:
Millions of Strange Shadows**

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by
Ethan Lewis

**Cambridge
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For Corrine Frisch and Mark Pence,
Cherished wife and finest friend,
The true progenitors of this compendium

What is your substance, whereof are you made,
That millions of strange shadows on you tend?

–Shakespeare, Sonnet 53

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Nota Bene

The four quarters of this compendium have each their own introduction, and yet a key underlying piece to the ensemble likewise requires its singular prologue. Hence, this note on “The Notes”—placed purposefully in near proximity to their primary texts. Not placed in the bottom margin, from where they might at times have appeared to wage a page war with the matter above; nor, though, stacked in a back repository by the index, where they might be ignored. For I have always plied the venue for additional *pensées*. The blurb for *The Shakespeare Project* over-generously advertised “mini-master essays on minutiae.” Though accurately in the “Preface” to that text, I credited that corpus as the third part of a three part book. And in *Reflexive Poetics*, I limn their purpose in terms of “verbal off-ramps toward productively harnessing energies”; and cite for precedent the practice of Stephen Booth (his edition of *Shakespeare’s Sonnets*) and F. O. Matthiessen (*The Achievement of T. S. Eliot*), respectively.

The Notes are intended to constitute an edifying, entertaining supplement—divagations insertion of which within the main material could plausibly interrupt the flow. Though often enough to peruse in the process of reading oughtn’t deter, and much may be garnered from the detours. As Hamlet noted of the recorders, “there is much music...in th[ese] little organ[s] (*Ham.* II.ii.368).

ESSAYS UPON EMERGENT OCCASIONS

Prefatory (abetted by John Donne): *Tyme* comprising (*pace* but) *the measure of motion*, so emergent instances *denominated* in time have occasioned the subsequent essays. Yet as *this Imaginary half-nothing, Tyme, be of the Essence of our Labors (of our Happinesses, Donne writes, but herein proved Labors of Love*)*, *how can they be thought durable since Tyme is not so?* In any case, we can *but* (for every conjunction there *is* a season) *lay hold upon Occasion, though it is a little peece of that, which is nothing, Tyme. And yet the best things are Nothing without that.* (Cf. John Donne, *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*, XIV)

*The specific venues for these critical (ad)ventures, Love's Labor's Locales:

- "The Music of Poetry as Symbolic Testament," *International Symbolist Conference*, Monticello, IL (April 2011).
- "*The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* and *The Object that is Desire*," *International Symbolist Conference*, Monticello, IL (March 2012)
- "Italo Calvino and The End of Reading," *International Symbolist Conference*, Paris, The Sorbonne (May 2014)
- "Eliot and Akhmatova," *Twentieth-Century Literature Conference*, Louisville, KY (February 2012)
- "May Sarton: Work of Time, Place, and Self," *Midwestern Gerontological Association Awards Ceremony*, Springfield, IL (January 2015)
- "James Joyce's *Dubliners*: Three Movements," *University of Illinois at Springfield Verbal Arts Festival*, April 2011
- "The Temptation of Saint Thomas," *UIS Verbal Arts Festival*, April 2008.
- "Four Hors d'oeuvres from T.S. Eliot's *Cocktail Party*," *UIS Verbal Arts Festival*, April 2013.
- "A Borgesian Variation on a Novel by Garcia Marquez," *Twentieth-Century Literature Conference*, Louisville, KY (February 2015)
- "Proclaim Your Aria," "Introduction" to *Evensong*, Poems by Nathaniel Schmidt (Portland, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2017)

The Music of Poetry as Symbolic Testament

This essay will contend that the music of poetry is intrinsically *symbolic*. To such preternatural associations with *that* term (as, for instance, Yeats' "a symbol entangles, in complex colours and forms, a part of the Divine Essence") we shall attend. Indeed, a more precise comprehension of that mystic ambiguity may be garnered by applying a "mundane" definition—symbol as that which it literally is and suggestive of more—to poetic music.

The same relevance we can discern through ostensibly opposed formulations, viz. a) If the music inheres in the sense, still it transcends that sense ("Words are the only melodeon"; "Every poem is a poem within a poem: the poem of the idea within the poem of the words" [Stevens]²); b) If it be distinguished from sense—as a metrical pattern or freer series of cadenced, modulated tones—music yet contributes to meaning ("the auditory imagination...works through meanings, or not without meanings" [Eliot]³; "A sentence is a sound in itself on which other sounds called words may be strung" [Frost]⁴). Either construal evinces the coalescence of music and semantics. Stevens (broaching Mallarmé) goes so far as to identify the music with the story such that "it becomes the story." No sooner states he so than he refines, and to some degree retracts. "When it is over, we are aware that we have had an experience very much like the story just as if we had participated in what took place."⁵

My piece proceeds through close analyses of a troika of Stevens poems, in conjunction with three dicta from his poetics. Though aware of the eclecticism begged by this approach, I do think that the author of "The Connoisseur of Chaos" would concur with it, and the exact yet abstract character of Symbolism indeed encourages it.

The squirming facts exceed the squamous mind,
 If one may say so. And yet relation appears,
 A small relation expanding like the shade
 Of a cloud on sand, a shape on the side of a hill.⁶

And Stevens, as Hugh Kenner remarks, epitomizes the Symbolist legacy to American literature.⁷

From *The Necessary Angel*, we read “that, above everything else, poetry is words; and that words, above everything else, are in poetry, sounds.”⁸ That is not to say, that is *precisely saying other than*, that mere sounds make words:

If it was only the dark voice of the sea
 That rose, or even colored by many waves;
 If it was only the outer voice of sky
 And cloud, of the sunken coral water-walled,
 However clear, it would have been deep air,
 The heaving speech of air, a summer sound
 Repeated in a summer without end
 And sound alone.⁹

No, words are “more than that.” Recurring to his essay (aptly styled “The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words”), Stevens practically pleads for “The deepening need for words to express our thoughts and feelings which, we are sure, are all the truth that we shall ever experience, having no illusions.”¹⁰ That passion is poeticized in the lyric piece we’re sampling, which veritably demonstrates its stated aspiration for semantic tone-shapes that can even compass shades, salt, smell:

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.

(ll. 51–55)

But we have jumped ahead of ourselves to cite “The Idea of Order at Key West.” That work constitutes prosodic *meditation*, the most elevated genre in Stevens’ harmonic array. A meditation ought be distinguished from the *musical lyric*, wherein words, though not entirely “mere” sounds, *are* sounds “above everything else.” As in

The Pleasures of Merely Circulating

The garden flew round with the angel,
The angel flew round with the clouds,
And the clouds flew round and the clouds flew round
And the clouds flew round with the clouds.

Is there any secret of skulls,
The cattle skulls in the woods?
Do the drummers in black hoods
Rumble anything out of their drums?

Mrs. Anderson’s Swedish baby
Might well have been German or Spanish,
Yet that things go round and again go round
Has rather a classical sound.¹¹

This fillip aims to enchant in the most fundamental cognate sense. (Just chanting the stanzas won’t suffice, and is actually discouraged by the tri-syllabic metrical matrix at its core. Trochees prompt chants (“Tiger, tiger, burning bright, In the Forest of the Night”). Because the surplus syllables ending lines one and ten are rounded off by the subsequent foot in the following lines, thereby lengthening the anapestic chain; due too, to the prevailing VOWel sOUNds, we “go round and again go round” in recitation of a verbal, or virtual, *chantant* (Fr., singsong).

Grant the primary “Pleasure” of the audile motion, meaningfully sinister undertones are lodged within, tucked specifically in the second stanza:

Is there any secret in skulls,
 The cattle skulls in the woods?
 Do the creatures in black hoods
 Rumble anything out of their drums?

The clogging iambs and guttural tones reinforce the semantic import. “Words are [also] thoughts,” our own and others’—even “the thoughts of men and women ignorant of what it is they are thinking.” However relatively mindless of the dis-ease, it lingers in “The Pleasures.”¹²

Still, these subterranean “Rumb[lings]” are muted, sealed even. How different the effect would prove (as my student, Elaiya Rucker, remarked) were the order of stanzas two and three inverted. “A poem may consist of several poetries,” thoughtfully jots Stevens in his remarkably suggestive, epigraphic *Adagia*. “Every poem is a poem within a poem: the poem of the idea within the poem of words.”¹³ What lies “within the poem of words” entitled “Pleasures of Merely Circulating” appears the kernel of some dark “idea”—akin to what Frost intimates at the close of one sonnet: “What but design of darkness to appall?” Though the couplet completes with a belittling: “If design govern in a thing so small.”¹⁴ And so here in Stevens, “the poem of the idea within the poem of words” is suborned by another figure, this one musical.

Yet, grant much of the nature of words as sound, there yet inheres¹⁵—what might we call it, a verbal instinct?—to say *something*. If not instinct, might one attribute it to force of habit? “[Words] are so used to being discursive that it is almost impossible to stop them discoursing,” observes Sir Frank Kermode in his classic examination of Symbolist and Imagist poetics rooted in the notion of the *Romantic Image*.¹⁶ In “Pleasures” and like *bons mots*, Stevens contrives, almost of necessity for its acceptance (à la Carroll, Lear, and Seuss, whom Stevens in this playful vogue resembles), what “oddly enough, makes sense, or so makes it that the words make sense.” To this keen formulation, Hugh Kenner appends Mallarmé’s “*laisser l’initiative aux mots*.”¹⁷ Yet were Stevens simply tooting a vocal horn or strumming upon a blue guitar of words, he could exemplify but part of the explanatory power of terming poetic music fundamentally symbolic. Kenner subsequently underscores Stevens’ faith, in the absence of other faith, that every poem “is precisely

about the creation of the concepts it creates, *and about a man's need for such a creation of concepts.*"¹⁸ Such a piece as "Anecdote of a Jar" heightens the coalescence of the poem of the idea with the poem of words:

Anecdote of the Jar

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

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

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

This verse utilizes like prosodic means of music making as those displayed in "Pleasures," even the same aural paronomasia on the "ou/ow" phoneme. A lilting iamb dominates the meter to much the same effect as the prominent anapest in the prior piece—i.e., in conjunction with the phoneme and the imagery, to yield a sense of rounding about. But there means something more here—something intimated in lines 9–10, which though cumbering the movement as had the other lyric's second stanza (here, by virtue of the consecutive hard end-stops), brooks no summary dismissal:

It took dominion everywhere.
The jar was gray and bare.

Now, from within, "the poem of the idea" governs "the poem of the words" rather than being repressed. As with so many Stevens poems, like "The Idea of Order at Key West," we might paraphrase that this "Anecdote" concerns

the human need to arrange one's surroundings by imposition of an imaginative act. "The plainness of plain things is savagery," Stevens reflects in his essentially celebratory "Ordinary Evening in New Haven" (iv). Celebratory, for even ordinariness provides safe haven if strongly imagined. To the Stevensian south of Connecticut, in virtual "Tennessee," the jar itself appears "plain": "gray and bare," but also "tall" and "round" as many jars are wont to be. "[W]hether the poet is for Nature or for Art," Kermode avers, "is irrelevant, because the point of the jar's *difference*—its *being ajar* from its surroundings—and the manner of its difference are what matters."¹⁹

At this point, I risk too radical a deviation from my subject matter, hence am obligated to inform you (and thus prevent myself from discoursing) on Stevens' equal attractions, sometimes at various junctures in his life, others instantaneously—Stevens' passions for *gaudiness* and *plainness*, respectively: both of which (possibly, especially the latter) requiring imagination as disciplined as free. This (quite important) topic necessitates analysis of such disparate texts as "The Comedian as the Letter C" and "The Snow Man"; the ostensibly paradoxically titled "Of Mere Being"²⁰ and the oh-so aptly nominated "Angel Among Paysans." That study would likewise assess the greater number of rhetorical pyrotechnic pieces composed early on, vis-à-vis the stripped abstractions taking up most of Stevens' late creative energies.

Rather than veer off thus, I wish simply to underscore the correspondence within the *difference* noted by Kermode—what might be termed "Anecdote"'s *harmony of ajariness*. Correspondence, of course, constitutes a major staple in the Symbolist lexicon. I am suggesting in poems such as "Anecdote" a dual music: a morphological equivalence of sound scheme and sense. Though the idea exerts authority over the prosody, we do the poem injustice to premise the content over the form. Retreating, for the moment, to the faulty terminology this equivalence would transcend, we could say that the nominal meaning also serves as a "meter" for the verbal music in exact proportion to the meter/meaning relationship usually construed. "The Pleasures of Merely Circulating," conversely, had *completely* inverted Emerson's conventional formula: in that piece (truly a piece in the musical sense of the term), it was *not* the "argument that ma[d]e [the] poem"; but rather (to re-ascribe his description) a euphony "so passionate and alive that like the spirit of a

plant or an animal it has an architecture of its own, and adorns nature with a new thing.”²¹ The precision of “Anecdote”’s correspondence of music and meaning can in fact effect a less than satisfying reading, when, “distracted by the double sense,” one tunes out either to focus on the other. Hence, for Peter Viereck, in his review for *Contemporary Poetry* (1948), as for Nicholas Teeter, a star student in my class, “Anecdote” is vacuous: “the point is reached where we have almost endless polish and no jar”;²² whereas Howard Baker (favorably) and Yvor Winters (damningly) view the jar as a pillar of Stevens’ thought, yet hardly hear the poem.

“Distracted by the double sense”—the phrase belongs to Stevens, from his essay (in *Angel*) examining “Effects of Analogy” in an eclectic array of works, commencing with Bunyan:

But of such an indisputable masterpiece [as *Pilgrim’s Progress*] it must be true that one reader, oblivious of the other meaning, reads it for the story and another reader, oblivious of the story, reads it for the other meaning; and that each finds in perfection what he wants. But...

Stevens posits

a third reader, one for whom the story and the other meaning should come together like two aspects that combine to produce a third or, if they do not combine, inter-act, so that one influences the other and produces an effect similar in kind to the prismatic formations that occur about us in nature, as in the case of reflections and refractions.²³

This auditor straddles the threshold between *differences that yet relate* and *differences that yet cross over into a virtual or actual unity*. Though both types of disparateness accord with a doctrine of correspondence, the second type, consisting of a state of two-and-one, proves more profoundly Symbolic.

In “Effects of Analogy,” Stevens intimates that this cross-over occurs with regard to the music of poetry, for a species of modern poetry—namely,

the aforementioned *meditation*. That is Stevens' term. Eliot calls some of his works in this form, outright, a "Love Song (for J. Alfred Prufrock)," "Preludes," and a "Rhapsody (on a Windy Night)." Stevens instances lines from this latter (ll. 56–68²⁴) as "a specimen of what is meant by music today." The passage "contains rhymes at irregular intervals and it is intensely cadenced." Yet just "yesterday, or the day before," from "the time [that] the use of the word...in relation to poetry has come down to us,"

music...meant metrical poetry with regular rhyme schemes repeated stanza after stanza. All of the stanzas were alike in form. As a result of this, what with the repetitions of the beats of the lines, and the constant and recurring harmonious sounds, there actually was a music.... Yet the passage from Eliot was musical. It is simply that there has been a change in the nature of what we mean by music. It is like the change from Haydn to a voice intoning.

What follows functions, remarkably, as both description and control for a comparative experiment. The meditative music of poetry

is like the voice of an actor reciting or declaiming or of some other figure concealed, so that we cannot identify him, who speaks with a measured voice which is often disturbed by his feeling for what he says. There is no accompaniment. If occasionally the poet touches the triangle or one of the cymbals, he does it only because he feels like doing it. Instead of a musician we have an orator whose speech sometimes resembles music. We have an eloquence and it is that eloquence that we call music every day, without having much cause to think about it.²⁵

This paraphrase is *not* "that eloquence that we call music" today. However fluent, it lacks a sufficiently "intense cadence," or a sound scheme interpolating "rhymes at irregular intervals." More essentially, this voice, though "measured," is not "disturbed by feeling for what is said"—nor, as the voice of criticism, ought it be so. *Conversely*, that eloquence this eloquence describes is performed in

Of Modern Poetry

The poem of the mind in the act of finding
What will suffice. It has not always had
To find: the scene was set; it repeated what
Was in the script.

Then...

—stripped of the requisite metrical scaffolding and patterned rhyme—

Then the theatre was changed
To something else.

Eliot, 'mongst others, observes that any locution proves subject to scansion, and that "no verse is free for the man who wants to do a good job."²⁶ "We may therefore formulate as follows: the ghost of some simple metre should lurk behind the arras in even the 'freest' verse; to advance menacingly as we doze, and withdraw as we rouse. [For] freedom is only truly freedom when it appears against the backdrop of some artificial limitation."²⁷ And so above, as often in Stevens, though hardly exclusively for one who "of repetition is most master,"²⁸ behind the "arras" curtaining this "changed theatre" "Of Modern Poetry" "lurks" a flexible, albeit defined, largely pentameter sequence of lines tending toward iambs.²⁹ Effectively, a blank verse line such as that patterning the speech of an actor, "an insatiable actor," for the modern poem must continually "construct a new stage" from the sounds of words.

It has to be on that stage
And, like an insatiable actor, slowly and
With meditation, speak words that in the ear,
In the delicatest ear of the mind, repeat,
Exactly, that which it wants to hear,

The analogy to the drama at all times pertains; still, its effect is of analogy, for the speaker-audience, at once performing and presiding "In the delicatest ear of the mind," "listens, not to the play," for none is staged; "listens," rather,

to itself, expressed
 In an emotion as of two people, as of two
 Emotions becoming one.

Or have we in fact a production staged within the lyric: a performance in that mode to which Stevens alludes (in “The Snow Man”) as “The nothing that is [there].” Not a *play* per se. Exit the actor; manet the musician/orator playing an “emotional recital.” Hence, the “identify”ing of “the music that excites us” with “the story”—the union specified in Stevens’ essay by the precise *and* ambiguous pronoun:

it becomes the story and the speed with which we are following it. When it is over, we are aware that we have had an experience very much like the story just as if we had participated in what took place. It is exactly as if we had listened with complete sympathy to an emotional recital. The music was a communication of emotion.³⁰

The genesis of this investigation commenced in a poetry class when we were aiming at what is truly meant by “the music of poetry.” Is the term merely analogous? One does not after all (or rarely any longer) sing a poem; and even the tonal component of a song can be distinguished from the euphony of the articulated sounds, i.e. words. Yet the formulation surpasses analogy when we distinguish, in order to discern, *articulation* (division of vocal sound into distinct parts [words and syllables] each representing a notion or relation” [OED 4]) in *expression* (utterance, declaration as means of representation [OED 3,4]); for the OED (1) defines *music* as “That one of the fine arts which is concerned with the combination of sounds with a view to beauty of form and *expression* of emotion.”

For all our talking around and about the matter, our semantic quibbling accommodates kinds of poetic music. We have, first, the metrical and attendant prosodic forms once, as Wallace Stevens notes, *definitive* of this music. That is to say, the sound pattern we term rhythm combined with an echoing of pitches produced through the instrumentality of words. Again, though, that timbre differs from what one predicates by blowing air “as through an instrument”³¹ or drawing a bow upon strings.

Plausibly, we must simply acknowledge thus, and construe “music” according to how that signifier applies to the verbal medium. Yet when among the finest text-books isolates “the musical element of poetry” as “non-verbal,”³² we bristle. As Stevens says, words are fundamentally sounds; but so, too, are notes. Words are not, of course, as he remarks, “the only melodeon.”³³ But his polemic gist is driven by his insistence on the music of poetry signifying literally.

Literally? Well, more than merely metaphorically—hence, in the essential sense, *symbolically*. We can best (perhaps only) vault above the aporia of poetic music through Symbolist theory. Doing so, too, owns the reflexive advantage of, through music, better comprehending Symbolism. To such preternatural associations with *that* term (as, for instance, Yeats’ “a symbol entangles, in complex colours and forms, a part of the Divine Essence”) we can now return—and with more rigor to that mystic ambiguity—after remarking the most fundamental definition, which I posit thus: *a symbol is that which it actually presents, even as it also means more*. I give my wife a rose—a real rose I give to someone comparable to a rose though from that flower separate, which predicates comparison in the first place. Hence, the rose means also, all the while retaining its essential floralness—means also: why, so many things weakly paraphrasable (for a symbol, like a poem, transcends paraphrase) as *I love you; you are beautiful; you share with a rose that knack for “entangl[ing], in complex colours and forms, a part of the Divine Essence,”* etc. Let us, though, return from the abstract and aetherial to the mundane, and more general: *a symbol is what it actually presents, even as it also means more*.

From this simple formulation follows a bizarre paradox, which in the semantics of Symbolism suffers a fate like unto that of “music” in poetics. I.e., the paradox is accommodated, spoken about, or more precisely, around. I refer to the hendiadychal “one-through-two,” the arcane identity of the symbol concomitant with its nominal identity.

How else it may genuinely be said that *the music becomes the story* is expressed by Yeats: “it is right,...That we descant and yet again descant Upon the supreme theme of Art and Song.” Grant one plausible interpretation

of “After Long Silence” that “Art and Song” are “the supreme theme.” Such instances of music as the lyric topic, in ways surpassing (albeit related to) an ode celebrating song (such as Dryden’s “Song for Saint Cecilia’s Day” or Rilke’s “An der Musik,” resemble Stevens’ morphological equivalencies of music with narration.³⁴ By their distinctive overreaching, poeries of music underscore the dialectic of identity (*at once, one and two*) that permeates Symbolism.

NOTES

1. “The Symbolism of Painting” [1898], William Butler Yeats, *Essays and Introductions* (New York: Collier, 1961), 148.
2. *Adagia*, Wallace Stevens, *Collected Poetry and Prose* (New York: Library of America, 1997), 909, 912.
3. *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* ([1933]; rpt. Cambridge MA: Harvard, 1961), III.
4. Letter to John T. Bartlett [1922]; rpt. in Elaine Barry, *Robert Frost on Writing* (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 1973), 63.
5. “Effects of Analogy,” *The Necessary Angel: Essays in Reality and the Imagination* [1951], in Stevens, *Collected Poetry and Prose*, 720.
6. *CPP*, 195.
7. See Kenner’s extensive treatment, in conjunction and contrast with Williams, in “Something to Say,” *A Homemade World: The American Modernist Writers* (New York: Knopf, 1975), 50–90.
8. *CPP*, 663.
9. “The Idea of Order at Key West,” ll. 21–28.
10. *CPP*, 662.
11. *CPP*, 120.

12. Collate the middle stanza and the sober observations in “The Noble Rider” with these musings from Stevens’ friend (and at times antagonist):

Inside the bus one sees
His thoughts sitting and standing. His
thoughts alight and scatter—

Who are these people (how complex
the mathematic) among whom I see myself
in the regularly ordered plateglass of
his thoughts,...

They walk incommunicado, the
equation is beyond solution.

(W. C. Williams, *Paterson I* (9–10))

13. *CPP*, 912.
14. “Design,” *Selected Poems of Robert Frost*, with an Introduction by Robert Graves (New York: Rinehart and Winston, 1963), 198.
15. And plausibly, *not* “yet”—rather ineffably *intrinsic* to words’ sonic nature. Hence, again (cf. n3), Eliot’s mystical dictum on “the auditory imagination,” here quoted in full: “th[at] feeling for syllable and rhythm, penetrating far below the conscious levels of thought and feeling, invigorating every word; sinking to the most primitive and forgotten, returning to the origin and bringing something back, seeking the beginning and the end. It works through meanings, certainly, or not without meanings in the ordinary sense, and fuses the old and obliterated and the trite, the current, and the new and surprising, the most ancient and the most civilized mentality.”
16. Kermode, *Romantic Image* (New York: Macmillan, 1957), 136.
17. *A Homemade World*, 51–2. *To cede the initiative to words*—whereby, for instance, famously (in “Prose (pour des Esseintes)”) *desir* and *idées* by rhyming clone *des iridées*. “The poet has become a kind of magician or alchemist of language..., invoking and gathering the divine Irises that would otherwise be stillborn in the soil of desire and of the idea.” (Henry Weinfield, “Introduction” to his translation of Mallarmé’s *Collected Poems* [Berkeley: U of California P, 1994], xii.)
18. Quoted in *A Homemade World*, 53; emphasis mine; q.v. Stevens’ impassioned apologia cited above: “The deepening need for words to express our thoughts

and feelings which, we are sure, are all the truth that we shall ever experience, having no illusions, makes us listen to words when we hear them, loving them and feeling them, makes us search the sound of them, for a finality, a perfection, an unalterable vibration, which it is only within the power of the acutest poet to give them."

19. *Romantic Image*, 48.
20. To this lyric nothing "mere" in the diminutive sense pertains; Stevens may well have drawn not only on the sense of *pure*, but of now obscure denotations: *illustrious, beautiful, noble*. Within "Of Mere Being," the lavish and spare are cast in mutual relief:

The palm stands on the edge of space.
The wind moves slowly in the branches.
The bird's fire-fangled feathers dangle down. (*CPP*, 477)

21. Cf. Emerson, "The Poet" [1844]. "[W]e do not speak now of men of poetical talents, or of industry and skill in meter, but of the true poet.... For it is not meters, but a meter-making argument that makes a poem—... The thought and the form are equal in the order of time, but in the order of genesis the thought is prior to the form. The poet has a new thought; he has a whole new experience to unfold; he will tell us how it was with him, and all men will be richer in his fortune." (*Emerson's Essays* [New York: Harper & Row, 1951], 266–67.)
22. Rpt. in *Wallace Stevens: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Charles Doyle (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), 307. Baker's and Winters' respective comments appear on pages 127, 228–29 of this volume.
23. *CPP*, 708.
24. A washed-out smallpox cracks her face,
Her hand twists a paper rose,
That smells of dust and eau de Cologne,
She is alone
With all the old nocturnal smells
That cross and cross across her brain.
The reminiscence comes
Of sunless dry geraniums
And dust in crevices,
Smells of chestnuts in the streets

And female smells in shuttered rooms
And cigarettes in corridors
And cocktail smells in bars.

25. *CPP*, 719–20.
26. “The Music of Poetry,” in T. S. Eliot, *On Poetry and Poets* (New York: Faber and Faber, 1957), 37.
27. “Reflections on Vers Libre,” in Eliot, *To Criticize the Critic and Other Writings* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1991), 187.
28. Stevens, “Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction,” iii.9, *CPP*, 350.
29. See E. Dennis Taylor, “The Apparitional Meters of Wallace Stevens,” *Wallace Stevens Journal* 15.2 (Fall 1991): 209–28.
30. *CPP*, 720.
31. Even Wordsworth’s youth of Winander thus approximates not music per se, rather “mimic hootings to the silent owls” (“There was a Boy,” l.9).
32. *Elements of Literature*, eds. Robert Scholes et al., 4th ed. (Oxford, 1991), 551.
33. Typographic composition augments this description’s interpretative torque. Melodeon (*OED* 1): “A wind instrument furnished with a keyboard.” Cf. the famous treatise on “Projective Verse,” though Charles Olson concerns himself therein with “the machine as a scoring to [the poet’s] composing, as a script to its vocalization.” Stevens images “wind” transmuted, by a pushing on the pedals, as it were, into sounds. “Just as my fingers on these keys Make music, so the self-same sounds On my spirit make a music, too” begins “Peter Quince at the Clavier” (*CPP*, 72). Though Quince next notes that “Music is feeling, then, not sound,” that distinction simply suits the “supreme fiction” related in that particular poem. Of Stevens’ every composition we may say that the sounds of words (since “words, above everything else, are, in poetry, sounds”) more than merely accompany, but contribute considerably to the feeling.
34. And Yeats’ penultimate line of his brief “descant” instances additionally virtuosic play on the verbal melodeon—syllables in song sprung on such surprising material: “Bodily decrepitude is wisdom.”

The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter and The Object That Is Desire

The American Library Association's surprising selection of Carson McCullers' seventy year-old novel, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, as the featured text in its *Big Read* campaign, unwittingly afforded readers across the nation an exemplar for comprehending Symbolism. Or perhaps not unwittingly—who better than librarians, loaning for (a) living temporary stopgaps of desire: books, which satisfy by prompting an appetite for more books—who more than they understand Symbolism's fundamental economy.

For McCullers' novel presents just that, and clearly, albeit complicatedly. Most Symbolist texts are intrinsically obscure. As an "expression of the mysterious meaning of the aspects of existence,"¹ any disclosure of that mystery in *the form of a solution* would prove more than taboo, but also untrue. Since for Mallarmé, whom I here quote, and for Symbolism's great English apologist Yeats—since the mystery is the message, as the symbol "entangles, in complex colours and forms, a part of the Divine Essence,"² any paraphrasable sediment amounting to what the supposed symbol means would expose the speciousness of the symbol. True symbols don't satisfy thus; rather, to cite Heidegger echoing Mallarmé, they disclose mystery as mystery.³

We can more closely approximate comprehending Symbolism through a dramatization of the experience—enabling observation of its characteristics. Those characteristics we can state concretely, as elements in a Symbolist economy, i.e. the principles according to which symbolic resources—poems, paintings, people—function.

Neither a drama nor perhaps in the strictest sense a work of Symbolism, McCullers' essay in novel form depicts those operative principles, as a) *wanting as what we want*; and b) *the ostensible object of desire also perpetuating longing*.

Simple enough; so much for a synopsis.... That none of us are exiting the room, however, betrays that *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* may itself partake in Symbolism more than I've suggested. Let us explore, therefore, how the text "entangles...part of the Divine Essence." That is to say, let's consider what the novel is about, by studying specific passages, then extending study intertextually. A cohort of poets keenly highlights what the novel is about.

Early on, one of *Heart's* four protagonists, young Mick Kelly, hungers thus:

I want—I want—I want—was all that she could think about—but just what this real want was she did not know. (52)⁴

To note how McCullers phrases this passage invites recognizing how she does not phrase it. She does *not* write "she did not know just what she wanted." "Just what the want *is*," not "what she wants" is at issue here. The ostensible object of want is left out of the locution. Far later in the novel, Mick appears—but truly only appears—to redirect her search. She is composing a song (trying to compose—under the practically impossible circumstances that one could say this novel is also "about"), "This Thing I Want I know Not What":

...a beautiful, marvelous song—very slow and soft. At first she had started to write a poem along with it, but she couldn't think of ideas to fit the music. Also it was hard to get a third line to rhyme with what. (242)

Reflect on what rhyme does, or what one does with rhyme. Rhyme in essence means *go with*. She can't find a word to go with "what," because such a synonym, such an answer, is not so much what she's seeking. She wants *not* a *hat*, or a *flat*, or a *hut*⁵—not even *that*, which in any case like *hat* and *flat* completes a slant rhyme. But in fact *that* most closely accords with *what*, if