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The Earth's Tragic Drone: Revealing the Incommunicability of Nature's Mournful Sounds in Wallace Stevens

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ABSTRACT

The subject of this article is the earth's "tragic drone" and its incommunicability in the poetry of Wallace Stevens, who conceives of the earth as an "incommunicable mass," from which the human "demands his speech." Challenging the views of critics who have written about the relationship between nature's sounds and human language in Stevens' poetry, this article reconsiders the role of sound in Stevens' poetry and the development of his concept of the earth's tragic drone and its incommunicability. Walter Benjamin's text on language in "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man" serves as an ideal hermeneutic approach to Stevens' poetry in the sense that they are both concerned with mute nature and its mourning for speechlessness.

In Stevens, nature's mournful sounds were at first "meaningless" to us humans because they were "not ours." As it lacks human speech, the earth communicates its "tragic drone" that is "so much less than speech" "[o]n the level of that which is not yet knowledge." To comprehend these mournful sounds, man thus needs to "demand his speech" from the earth. In the hearing of the necessary angel of earth, they become "half-meanings" and begin to take the form of human language. The poeticized sounds in Stevens' poetry concerning the earth's tragic drone and its incommunicability become not only "[a] new knowledge of reality," but also a meaningful, well-intended revelation that helps the reader "see the earth again" and reconsider his place on earth. As the earth perishes, no man can be. Stevens demonstrates his personal care for "our perishing earth" and us humans because it is the earth upon which man dwells.

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I. Introduction: The Earth's Tragic Drone

The earth's "tragic drone" and its communicability is a major theme in Wallace Stevens' poetry.[1] In "Angel Surrounded by Paysans" (1950), Stevens stages a dialogue between one of the countrymen and an angel who presents himself as "the angel of reality" (423). Revealing himself as one of the countrymen, he has neither "ashen wing" nor "a tepid aureole" (423). The angel is "necessary" because, firstly, he is "quickly gone" and therefore only "seen for a moment," and secondly, the countrymen can only hear the earth's "tragic drone" rise in his hearing and "see the earth again" in his sight (423). In "Less and Less Human, O Savage Spirit" (1947), Stevens also writes of man's relationship with the earth and raises questions concerning language and the communicability of nature's sounds.[2] Having no relations in the moon and being "too distantly a part" of the mass, "the human" is "the alien" that "demands his speech / [f]rom beast or from the incommunicable mass" (288). In contrast, the "god in the house" must not only "dwell quietly" but also "be incapable of speaking" (288). Furthermore, he must be one "[t]hat will not hear us when we speak" (288). Although Stevens conceives of the earth as the "incommunicable mass," in his poetry nature's mournful sounds always have a saying. The word *saying* is more than the present continuous of the word *say* or

[1] Although Stevens' ideas of the earth and nature are quite different, I sometimes use these two terms interchangeably. In Stevens, the word *nature* often refers to natural environments inhabited by plants or animals. It is also where we can see the "twenty snowy mountains" ("Thirteen Ways" 74) or the river of rivers in Connecticut. The earth on the other hand has more complex connotations. It is where man dwells upon. It also refers to human society. In "Imagination as Value" (1948) Stevens mentions that the "great poems of heaven and hell have been written, but the great poem of the earth remains to be written" (730). Stevens believes that the faith in such a poem will constitute the true prize of spirit for it promises a "practicable earthly paradise" (731). In sum, the earth for Stevens is humanity; he writes in "World Without Peculiarity" (1950), "[i]t is the earth itself that is humanity" (388).

[2] The word *humanity* can refer to people in general or all people in the world as a whole. It also has meanings of the qualities characteristic of people, understanding and kindness toward other people and the condition of being human. The word *mankind* also means the whole of the human race, including both men and women. Like the word *humanity*, the word *man* as an uncountable noun can refer to people in general, the human race or humans as a group or from a particular period of history. Words used in combination with *man* include the history of man or the evolution of man. This use of *man* is often related to history, the natural environment or the damage humans cause the earth. Although Stevens writes that "[i]t is the human that is the alien" ("Less" 288), he uses the term "man-locked set" ("Paysans" 423) when he refers to the state of the earth. I am aware of the importance of inclusive language; however, I use the word *man* in my reading to refer to people in general as I deal with Stevens' development of the earth's incommunicability, its "man-locked set" and its relation to humans as a group or from a particular period of history, e.g., the countrymen in "Angel Surrounded by Paysans."

a linguistic expression. Grounded in showing nature's saying, Stevens' poetry is propelled by man's hearing, and listening to, the saying of nature's sounds. To dramatize man's break from nature and what he sees as a cultural catastrophe, Stevens developed a dialectic narrative in which nature's sounds serve as a framework for poems of encounters between nature and man, meaningless sound and meaningful saying, the particular and the universal in the pre-World War II era. By emphasizing nature's mournful and tragic sounds in Stevens' poetry, I believe that the sound of his poetic words opens up a space for us to have a dialogue with the earth and reconsider our relationship with it. Stevens' poetry concerning the earth's tragic drone helps us readers "see the earth again" and respond to its mournful sounds poetically.

In this article I focus on how "the sounds of the earth itself" (Gerber, "Introduction" 7),[3] e.g., "the sound of the wind," "the sound of a few leaves" and "the sound of the land" (Stevens, "Snow Man" 8), speak to me. In this way I challenge the views of critics who have written about the relationship between nature's sounds and human language in Stevens' poetry. My reading of these poems asserts the development of Stevens' concept of the earth's tragic drone and its communicability, that is, how nature's mournful and meaningless sounds turn into a meaningful revelation. As a result, my analysis of these poems is presented in chronological order according to their publication dates. Read from a Benjaminian, postmodern critical perspective, I believe these poems develop a powerful dialectic between mute nature and the new poetry of nature that Stevens reinvents with the modernist consciousness of language.

In Stevens, there are three stages of how the earth communicates with man in its tragic drone. In the first stage, nature's mournful sounds are "inhuman" and "meaningless" ("Idea" 105). "The Idea of Order at Key West" (1936) shows that nature's sounds are "meaningless" as the cry of the veritable ocean is not "uttered word by word" and therefore "not ours" (105). Thus, nature's sounds are incomprehensible to man. In "Less and Less Human, O Savage Spirit," Stevens conceives of the earth as the "incommunicable mass" (288). As man fails to understand nature's mournful sounds, he becomes "the alien" to the earth (288). To comprehend these sounds, man needs to "demand his speech" from the earth (288). This reinforces two points: man's alienation from nature

[3] Natalie Gerber has categorized sound as vocalizations in Stevens' poetry into "the sound of words," "preverbal sounds" and "the sounds of the earth itself" ("Introduction" 7). In my reading, however, I focus on how the sound of Stevens' poetic words helps the earth speak. I do not stress on preverbal sounds because nature's sounds are translated into poetry; therefore, its sounds cannot be preverbal.

and his attempt to know nature. At this stage, the mournful sounds made by the incommunicable earth already have a saying; however, they are incommunicable and therefore meaningless to man.

In the second stage, nature continues making mournful sounds to communicate with man, but its sounds are transmuted into "half-meanings" (Stevens, "Paysans" 423). In "Angel Surrounded by Paysans," Stevens argues that the countrymen can "see the earth again / [c]leared of its stiff and stubborn, man-locked set" in the sight of the angel of earth (423). Nature's mournful sounds begin to take the form of human language as the earth's "tragic drone" rises like "watery words awash" and "meanings said / [b]y repetitions of half-meanings" in the hearing of the angel of earth (423). As "The Region November" (1950-55) shows that the earth utters in "so much less than speech" and communicates "[o]n the level of that which is not yet knowledge" (472, 473), its tragic drone is only "[a] revelation not yet intended" (473).

Stevens' poetry in itself is the final stage of how the earth communicates with man. In the final stage, nature's mournful sounds are no longer meaningless or incommunicable in the expression of the imagination. Like the bird's scrawny cry in "Not Ideas About the Thing But the Thing Itself" (1954), they become "[a] new knowledge of reality" (452). The earth that was once the incommunicable mass becomes communicable and communicates with the reader on the level of knowledge. As its tragic drone is further transmuted into a meaningful well-intended revelation, the earth is freed from "its stiff and stubborn, man-locked set."

A few questions come to mind. Why is the earth's drone "tragic"? Why is the mass "incommunicable"? Does the mass try to communicate? What does it communicate? With whom does it try to communicate? To be communicable can mean either to be capable of being communicated as an object, or communicative, i.e., to be capable of communicating as a subject. The earth is sometimes incommunicable as an object, e.g., the incommunicable mass, while at other times it is incommunicable as a subject, e.g., the tragic drone that is incommunicable. In poems like "Angel Surrounded by Paysans" and "Less and Less Human, O Savage Spirit," the poet dramatizes his concern about modern language and showcases its dilemma.

There may be two reasons why Stevens poeticizes the earth's drone as being tragic and incommunicable. The first reason why the earth's drone is tragic is that the earth is in its "man-locked set." Although the earth tries to

communicate in a tragic drone, it refuses to be imposed on by human speech. This could mean that man has locked the earth with his own "stiff" and "stubborn" perceptions that have been constructed by his own language. As Stevens sometimes refutes romanticism and the pathetic fallacy, e.g., in "Less and Less Human, O Savage Spirit" (Voros 76), he also transmutes nature's sounds into the sound of poetic words and characterizes them as mournful and tragic. This results in an inherently self-contradictory problem: Stevens falls prey to the pathetic fallacy.

To be more specific, nature itself is never mute. It constantly makes sounds but never speaks to or communicates with man because nature in itself does not need to respond to man in human language. Likewise, nature is never mute in Stevens' poetic world. It also makes sounds constantly, but the sounds it makes are never mere sounds. Stevens' poetry of nature's mournful sounds serves an aesthetico-political purpose: It reminds us readers of the earth's "stiff and stubborn, man-locked set" and helps us "see the earth again" in a new way, i.e., poetically. In giving expression to nature, Stevens' poetry of the earth's tragic drone helps nature speak on the plane of human language. Peter Middleton argues that "Stevens always celebrated sound in his poetry" (68); however, Stevens neither makes nature sing nor tries to tame nature so that it fits human expectation. Rather, nature in Stevens communicates by making mournful sounds. This allows us readers to notice these sounds and become enlightened about the specific relation we can have with nature; therefore, these mournful sounds have a meaningful saying.

However, nature's sounds are marginalized by the sound of poetic words. Upon being poeticized, they are no longer the thing itself as poetry imposes a linguistic violence on the thing itself, creates another "man-locked set" of language and imprisons the earth in it. The poeticization of sounds, though it demonstrates an act of resistance to the hierarchy of human language, becomes the fundamental dilemma in Stevens, who has tried to see the thing itself rather than the ideas of the thing. However, to help the reader understand his care for the "perishing earth" (Stevens, "Sunday" 55) upon which man dwells, it is necessary for the poet to poeticize.

This leads to the second reason, which is more closely related to my reading in this article. Man uses a language that is separate from the earth's language. Walter Benjamin's text on language in "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man" serves as an ideal hermeneutic approach for illuminating

Stevens' poetry in the sense that they are both concerned with mute nature and its mourning for speechlessness.

The importance of nature being mute and lacking human language is borne out in Andrew M. Lakritz's discussion, whose reading relies much on Benjamin's linguistic theory. In his discussion of "the form and function of the archaic as part of the motivation for modernist writing," particularly "the lost speech" of "mute nature" in Stevens, Lakritz argues that lyric itself is not only "an archaic image" but also "an obsolete and embarrassed form of expression" (1). Therefore, it is "the perfect medium" for exploring "the lost speech of the marginal, the hidden, the voiceless," i.e., "mute nature" (1). To my knowledge, Lakritz is the first critic to emphasize the point that nature lacks human language in Stevens as well as to rely on Benjamin's linguistic theory. Finding that "an original relation to the language of things, and to the things themselves, is no longer possible" because of the "great disease of modernity" (16), Lakritz appropriates Benjamin's conception of allegory that focuses on the relation between "the poet and the world" as well as "nature and history" into reading Stevens (5). In its Greek root, the word *allegory*, Lakritz points out, means to speak otherwise or to speak through metaphor; therefore, it suggests an ambivalence in thought as it investigates the depths of a double consciousness. Rather than creating the world from nothing and projecting onto natural material his own images, the poet engages himself with the material and suggests "an access to the innermost elements of the natural world and of the *other*" (13). For example, in "The Motive for Metaphor" (1947) Stevens begins with what Benjamin in "On Language as Such" describes as "the condition of a nature that speaks without articulate meaning being conveyed" (Lakritz 12). Lakritz argues that Stevens would test this central poetic argument throughout his career, deciding whether the poet should be "the master of all things and in language creates the world entirely" or the one who recognizes the fact that the world outside also has meaning (12).

Much of the poetry Stevens wrote in the thirties, Lakritz contends, establishes an interest in searching for "a new language for experience" (24). After having started writing poetry again in the thirties, Stevens began to think more about "the relationship between poetry and history" (20); however, this search placed him in "a paradoxical situation" (24). Stevens felt the need to find in language a form of nobility that might help people resist "the pressure of reality" and "live their lives" while language itself had suffered from the

violence of being commodified and "misused in the common press" or "colonized by petty dictators" (24). Consequently, a violence "against normative language practices has to be undertaken" (25). Lakritz believes this to be "the central moment" of Stevens' paradoxical situation: Stevens needs to undertake a corresponding violence "from within" to resist the "violence to language itself," which is "the very vehicle through which we experience ourselves and others" (25). By appealing to Benjamin's notion of the destructive character, Lakritz explores how this "homeopathic violence" marks "the particular modernism of Stevens's aesthetic" (25). For Lakritz, Benjamin's destructive character is "a useful pathway into the peculiar modernism Stevens represents" (29). Allegory can be "the vehicle for the destructive character" (31). Symbol on the other hand "represents a mode of representation" that draws back from a nature over which humankind has little power (31). Stevens' achievement in poetry therefore lies in the fact that he is able "to imagine the world without transforming it into symbol" for he knows that "once language constructs the world," it is "due for destruction" (68).

More recently, Jonathan Ivry argues that Benjamin's theories of "homogeneous, empty time" (historical time) and "Messianic time" (redemptive time) in "Theses on the Philosophy of History" and "a prelapsarian 'pure language' (*reine Sprache*)" in "On Language as Such" resonate with "a redemptive, Messianic strain in Stevens" (142-43), even though Stevens had no knowledge of Benjamin's writings (142). For example, "The Comedian as the Letter C" (1923) stages Crispin's journey in redemptive terms and places a tremendous burden on its hero, making the leap from "unredeemed historical time" into "life inside redemptive, Messianic time" (142). Furthermore, Stevens' conception of "supreme fiction" in "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" (1947), which Ivry considers to be Stevens' "major poem of redemptive aesthetics" (143), resembles Benjamin's idea of "pure language" as a "quasi-Messianic redemption of debased human language to which all poems aspire" (145). Ivry points out that in "On Language as Such" Benjamin "identifies divine language in Genesis as the original performative utterance" (143). As a speech act, Ivry continues, such an utterance "has the power of issuing forth creation" (143).

God's word embodies the creative force while Adamic word marks an essential link between the name and its object. Human language indicates "the post-Edenic separation between God and humankind" and articulates a

separation, e.g., between word and object (Ivry 144). What lies beneath this divinely creative language is Adamic language; it is the power of naming the world that God grants Adam in Eden. Even though it is a less perfect version of the divine, creative language, Ivry rightly contends that Adamic language nonetheless completes the creation by "translating the imperfect, mute language of things into the language of names" (144; Wolin 42). The name, as a translation of the mute object, redeems the object not only from silence but also "draws it back closer to the divine word that created it" (Ivry 144) for the reason that man's name language and the nameless language of things are not only "related in God" but also "released from the same creative word" (Benjamin, "On" 70). What is worthy of note is that Ivry points out that in Benjamin the entry into Messianic time is "marked by a change in the relationship of language to the world" (143). Therefore, he argues that Messianic time is "a shift from language as cognitive to language as creative" (143), signaling "the redemption of human language, the closing of the gap between word and object (or signifier and signified), and the ultimate return to the creative power of the divine word" (144).

Although Stevens had never read Benjamin's writings, there are indeed some similar ideas shared by Stevens and Benjamin. For a start, Stevens used the word *God* a lot as an "inherently poetic" idea ("Collect" 851) despite the sociocultural milieu he was in. The word *God* for him is the "major" and "ultimate" poetic idea ("Concerning" 806; "Collect" 859) that can be sought in "the object itself" ("Ordinary Evening" 405). Therefore, Stevens' usage of the word *God* is not to be confused with that of Benjamin, who is also uninhibited in using the word *God* in his Kabbalistic conception of language, because for Benjamin it is only philosophically expedient ("On" 67).

Another similar idea shared by Stevens and Benjamin is the idea that nature mourns for her muteness and speechlessness (Benjamin, "On" 72-73). Nature for Benjamin is also "mute" (72). While its muteness is "named by man," the great sorrow of nature is its "speechlessness" (72). Nature laments for her speechlessness and mourns for her muteness (73). Lament is "the most undifferentiated, impotent expression of language" (73). There is always lament, e.g., in a rustling of plants. Nature is therefore "imbued with a nameless, unspoken language" (74). As "the residue of the creative word of God" (74), nature's language is "comparable to a secret password that each sentry passes to the next in his own language, but the meaning of the password

is the sentry's language itself" (74). However, for Benjamin this proposition inversely leads into the essence of nature: In its mourning, nature inclines to speechlessness more than it is unable or disinclined to communicate (73).

The most striking resemblance between Stevens' poetry concerning the earth's tragic drone and Benjamin's conception of language is probably the translation of the language of things into man's language, the "communicating muteness of things (animals) toward the word-language of man" (Benjamin, "On Language as Such" 70). The fundamental principle of Benjamin's linguistic theory is that mental being communicates itself *in* language; therefore, "all language communicates itself" (63). However, the mental being that communicates itself *in* language is not its linguistic being: "What is communicable in a mental entity is its linguistic entity" (63). The common part of the communicable that lies underneath these different and enslaved languages needs to be translated into a language that is communicable to man. In short, the language of the thing needs to be translated into the name-language of man for it to become communicable to man, although translating the language of things into that of man does not simply mean to translate the mute into the sonic (70).

For Benjamin, the language of poetry is "partly, if not solely, founded on the name language of man" ("On" 73). There are also other kinds of languages, e.g., the language of sculpture or painting, that are founded on certain kinds of thing-languages. In these languages, Benjamin argues, "we find a translation of the language of things into an infinitely higher language" (73). We see that in Benjamin there is a gradation of language. Underneath the different languages, considered by Benjamin as enslaved languages, lies a common part of the communicable. "All higher language," Benjamin continues, "is a translation of lower ones" (74). As "removal from one language into another through a continuum of transformations," "[t]ranslation passes through continua of transformation" (70). Ultimately, translation "serves the purpose of expressing the innermost relationship of languages to one another" (Benjamin, "Task" 255). The task of the translator is not only to find "the particular intention toward the target language which produces in that language the echo of the original" (258) but also to "release in his own language that pure language which is exiled among alien tongues" (261). This means that for the sake of the pure language the translator's task is "to liberate the language imprisoned in a work in his re-creation of that work" (261).

What is worthy of note is that translation for Benjamin is also "necessary" ("On" 69). He finds the translation of "the unspoken nameless language of things" (70) into "the name-language of man" (70) necessary because translation can only be fully meaningful in the realization that every language "can be considered a translation of all the others," with the word of God being an exception (70). It is also because the language of things can only pass into the language of name, i.e., knowledge, through translation. And this translation is necessary because "man has fallen from the paradisiacal state that knew only one language," which for Benjamin must have been one of "perfect knowledge" (70-71). However, to translate the language of things into that of man does not simply mean to translate the mute into the sonic. It also means to translate the nameless, an imperfect language, into the name, a more perfect language (70). The languages of things are "imperfect" and "dumb" because sound was denied to them; therefore, they can only communicate through a "material community" (67).

As I peruse Stevens' poems, I find myself harkening back to Benjamin's "On Language as Such" and its invocation of mute nature's secret password as a metaphor of translation of different languages. I would like to emphasize that Stevens is not the only poet who hears nature's mournful sounds and knows its saying. What makes his poetry concerning the earth's tragic drone and its incommunicability special is his trope of the necessary angel of earth. In the poems considered in this article, the poet's dialectic narrative reveals that the tragedy of nature's speechlessness can exist only in poetry. Nature's "tragic" sounds are significant only in relation to the meaningless sounds poetry replaces. The meaningless nonhuman sounds always affect the tragic in the meaningful saying of nature's sounds even as the tragic affects the meaningless. Such a strategy allows Stevens to discern seeds of poetic reconceptualization of the world in any positive changes that might take place. Because of the necessary angel, nature's mournful sounds become communicable to the countrymen, though only in half-meanings. This is because the countrymen's daily language, though part of human language, is not poetic language. The angel of earth can translate nature's mournful sounds into human language, especially poetic language. He helps the countrymen "see the earth again," find poeticity in nature and respond poetically to the earth's tragic drone and its incommunicability.

Stevens' poetry not only reinforces the dialectical relationship between the sound of poetic words and nature's mournful sounds but also showcases his personal care for "our perishing earth" ("Sunday" 55). Such care can be "an intenser love" ("Dezembrum" 197) for "[t]he measure of the intensity of love / [i]s measure, also, of the verve of earth" ("Monocle" 12). As the earth perishes, no man can be. In consequence, Stevens reveals his personal care for man because it is the earth upon which man dwells.

II. The Role of Sound in Stevens' Poetry

In the early twentieth century, Stevens already uses poetry to reconsider the anthropocentric mastery of nature, rethinking how the sound of poetic words engages the reader's consciousness with nature's sounds. In "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" (1951), Stevens argues that the expression of the imagination and the sound of its "musical and creative powers of words" (657) help people live their lives (665). For him, poetry is "a revelation in words by means of the words" (663). Not only has it "to be something more than a conception of the mind," it also "has to be a revelation of nature" (Stevens, "Adagia" 904). Nature's sounds played an important part in Stevens since the publication of his first poetry collection, *Harmonium* (1923). As the lyrical subject of his poetry often describes a natural scene without a human present, Stevens adapts an impersonal voicing to explore the earth's tragic drone and its incommunicability. Moreover, he uses rhythm and rhyme to reinforce the semantic implications of poetry and negotiates between non-linguistic reality and his imaginative desire (Doreski 169-70). For these reasons, he often finds his voice in voicing the voicelessness of nature (Rotella 110).

Appropriately, *The Wallace Stevens Journal* has devoted two special issues to the topic of sound and music in Stevens' poetry. These papers demonstrate that sound is of great importance to Stevens. While the essays in the first special issue contribute to reading Stevens' use of sound systematically and provide insightful analyses of the meters and rhymes of

his diction,[4] those in the second one consider how Stevens uses sound and its effects to accentuate the collection and taxonomy of sound.[5] These papers also probe into sound as vocalizations made by human and nonhuman speakers as well as the content and context of non-source sounds in his verse (Gerber, "Introduction" 6-7). Since the first special issue, plenty of essays and books address "musical, linguistic, and prosodic" aspects of sound in Stevens (5). Furthermore, Stevens' use of natural and animal sounds and his delight in the sound of words become "central topics" when it comes to discussion of sound in Stevens (4). Although these studies focus on the sound of poetic words and the interconnections between sound, literary dialogues and society, they do not pay attention to nature's attempt to communicate with man in mournful sounds and the communicability of these sounds. This blind spot serves as a point of departure for my article.

III. Mute Nature as a Speaking Other

In *Reading & Writing Nature* (1991), Guy Rotella already shows that Stevens typically attends to moments of natural change and turns to nature to make epistemological questions, like Emily Dickinson and Robert Frost. As his skeptic's emphasis on subjectivity equals theirs, Stevens continues a long American tradition of attending to nature and "seek[ing] for the feelings it had

[4] Edited by Jacqueline Vaught Brogan, *Stevens and Structures of Sound* (1991) includes essays that point to "important sound patterns and phenomena" in Stevens' poetry (Gerber, "Introduction" 4) and concern themselves with how "[l]iterature constantly aspires to the condition of music" (Knowles 113). Sebastian D. G. Knowles shows that music is both tenor and vehicle for Stevens. As vehicle, music often carries Stevens' philosophy of poetry. As tenor, music is the primary purpose of the poetry while the poet's most certain function is mere sound (113). Furthermore, Diane Wakoski plays on the variations in Stevens' meter and celebrates the sound of poetry in "Sunday Morning," showing that we hear dactyls rather than iambic sound in this poem (128), as Margaret Dickie explores how Stevens' "lapses into preverbal strategies" work in relation to the language and poetry that surround them (133). In his reading, N. M. Hoffman focuses on the vital role of caesura, i.e., the breaking of repeated rhythmic effects, in Stevens' prosodic repertoire and examines some rhythmic habits of Stevens' poetry. For Hoffman, Stevens' use of the caesura "reveals certain idiosyncrasies of his aesthetic" (144).

[5] In *Wallace Stevens and "The Less Legible Meanings of Sounds"* (2009), edited by Natalie Gerber, Beverly Maeder examines Stevens' poetics that centers on "the linguistic and sensation-creating functions of certain sound patterns" and identifies the energizing effects of Stevens' "attempts to renew the sounds of poetry in the early twentieth century" (25). For Peter Middleton, Stevens always celebrates sound in his poetry (68). Stevens' relatively unusual preoccupation with nonsense syllables, onomatopoeia or neologisms, is the most obvious poetic strategy he takes to foreground the phonetic dimension of syllables and words in his poems (67). Sound, he contends, is a sign of vitality, manifesting energy of activity, thought or feeling for Stevens (68).

once engendered" (100-01). However, Stevens shifts those epistemological questions from the meaning of God to "the meaning of meaning" (101). Therefore, Stevens recognizes that all meaning as human invention might lead to sufficient transfigurations (100-01). In this sense, he surpasses Dickinson and Frost.

Lakritz also notices that Stevens turns to nature and asks epistemological questions, but for him Stevens questions the meaning of language. Human language and the language of nature prepare Stevens' poetry not only "as a collaboration" but also "as a reciprocal translation" (5). We get into the realm of a dialectical and reciprocal relation between the self and the other in Stevens' poetry. As nature lacks a human language, it is mute and voiceless (1). Using a nonhuman language, nature remains distinct from culture and "communicates mutely" (5); therefore, Stevens can remake poetry and culture on the grounds of the archaic image of poetry and contemplate the natural world around his vision. Exploring "the appeal to nature" and "the way crossings between nature and history are dramatized" in Stevens' poetry (19), Lakritz argues that Stevens' poetry "comprises self and other, a ground where human language and its other cannot be distinguished because each is defined by the solicitation of the other" (11). As a speaking other, nature can neither communicate nor signify in human languages. Unable to speak for itself, nature "must be carried over, troped, translated" in human language, Lakritz argues (4). It is the speaking subject, e.g., the poet, the storyteller or the namer, that helps mute nature articulate. For Lakritz, the importance of the speaking subject lies in his ability and privilege in bringing forth the audible signs of an encounter between self and other into language.

Gyorgyi Voros, too, considers nature a speaking other in Stevens, arguing that nature in Stevens does not respond to "human longing in human terms" (3), though his poetry bears a specific relation between man and nature (14). Stevens recognizes nature's "unmitigated" otherness (69) and acknowledges the limits of human perception and consciousness by accepting nature's otherness (147). Stevens' poetry not only poses his philosophical and artistic dilemma but also shows himself as a poet who expresses the crisis of modernism in terms of "humanity's disquieting and vexed relationship to the natural world" (3). Stevens grounds human experience in "the physical, the processive, and the perceptual" (12). His term *reality* thus "emphasizes the reality of physical Nature as nonhuman Other" for it accommodates human

imagination as a product of Nature (11). Also, the word *nonhuman* often guises itself as the wind or speechlessness in Stevens' poetic diction (31). As such, Stevens' poetry "illuminates" a new way of being in the world (4). Stevens' contribution to modern poetry, Voros argues, is that he has moved "from the romantic to the phenomenological" (11). His great poetic achievement lies in the fact that he has "reformulate[d] the power of the imagination as a power within rather than over Nature" (17).

These findings are of great interest to me because they demonstrate that nature, lacking human language, does not respond to man in human terms and therefore communicates mutely. They shed new light on reading nature's mournful sounds in Stevens, who constantly turns the sound of poetic words into an encounter between man and nature, helps nature signify in human languages and builds a dialectical and reciprocal relationship between self and other. Moreover, Stevens poeticizes nature's sounds so that nature may respond to human longing and communicate in human terms. As Stevens often adapts an impersonal voicing to explore nature's mournful sounds, his poetry concerning the earth's tragic drone symbolizes the speech of the voiceless and enables him to find his voice in voicing nature's voicelessness.

IV. The Incommunicable Mass and Its Meaningless Sounds: The Meaningless Plungings of Water and the Wind

In Wallace Stevens, the sounds of animals are "inseparable from nature itself" (Leggett 39). Since *Harmonium*, Stevens' treatment of nature's sounds can be categorized into natural sounds and animal sounds. Natural sounds can be heard in "The Snow Man" (1923). Stevens writes:

> One must have a mind of winter
> . . .
> not to think
> Of any *misery* in *the sound of the wind*,
> In *the sound of a few leaves*,
>
> Which is *the sound of the land* . . .
> ("Snow Man" 8; emphasis added)

Animal sounds can be heard in two poems. In "Domination of Black" (1923), Stevens writes, "I heard them cry—the peacocks" (7). In "Autumn Refrain" (1923), grackles' "skreak and skritter" incise "[t]he stillness of everything gone" (129). These poems reveal nature as a speaking other and its sounds as being mournful.

Stevens' use of animal sounds, Brian Brodhead Glaser contends, are ambivalent. For example, Stevens has opened up the territory of emotional ambivalence toward animals in "Mountains Covered with Cats" (1947). He not only realizes "how human encounters with animals are rife with subsurface dynamics" but also recognizes the "modernist tendency to efface the radical alterity of animal life" (Glaser 211). That "radical alterity" is one of the ways in which "humans can ethically and imaginatively be alongside animals" (211). Being "radically other," animals are the "living entities to experience and know with a mixture" of both positive and negative emotions, Glaser argues (211). Different kinds of animals arouse "distinct sorts of ambivalence in Stevens" (211); a good example is the bird. Stevens often hears the bird in his poetry, partly "because of the romantic tradition of poetry that influenced him" (214); however, his exposure to the sounds of birds, especially grackles, and his loss of the romantic desire to merge into the being of the bird in "Autumn Refrain," show that the nightingale is "not a bird for Stevens as an American poet" as it is not native to America (215).

Grackles, or the American blackbirds, are "set against" the English nightingales and "their inevitable Keatsian evocation" (Lensing 75). The nightingales are merely "the name of a bird" the poet has never heard and shall never hear: It is "the name of a nameless air" (Stevens, "Refrain" 129). The speaker only hears the unnamed wind "pervasive" (Voros 141) in the "skreaking and skrittering residuum" and "the key of that desolate sound" (Stevens, "Refrain" 129). The bird could be any bird the poet hears at night and pursues; therefore, only Stevens' poetic words about the nightingale, the "skreak and skritter" of birds, are heard at the end of the poem. Stevens has chosen stillness over silence after the grackles at evening have left rather than pursued the "birdsong as the voice of an immortal surrogate" (Glaser 215).

Glaser's reading of animal sounds in Stevens shows that nature's alterity is one of the ways in which "humans can ethically and imaginatively be alongside" nature (211). Drawing the reader's attention to the sound of his poetic words, Stevens enables the reader to hear again the saying of nature's

sounds and invites them to participate with his poetic performance by engaging their consciousness with it.

Nature's mournful sounds can also be heard in "The Idea of Order at Key West," a poem from Stevens' second poetry collection, *Ideas of Order* (1936): The "mimic motion" of the seawater "[m]ade constant cry . . . of the veritable ocean" (Steven, "Idea" 105). Stevens explores sound as vocalizations made by nonhuman speakers and uses the sound of poetic words to reveal the incommunicability of nature's mournful sounds:

> She sang beyond the genius of the sea.
> The water never formed to mind or voice,
> Like a body wholly body, fluttering
> Its empty sleeves; and yet its mimic motion
> Made constant cry, caused constantly a cry,
> That was not ours although we understood,
> Inhuman, of the veritable ocean. (Steven, "Idea" 105)

The poem begins with an unidentified songstress singing "beyond the genius of the sea." In contrast, the seawater's mimic motion did not sing. Rather, it "made constant cry" and caused constantly an "inhuman" cry of the ocean. The cry, the lyrical subject tells us, was "not ours." As a noun, the word *cry* can mean a loud articulate shout or scream that expresses a powerful feeling or emotion. Projected with human feelings, this word invokes mostly negative emotions. In the quoted lines above, the ocean's constant cry is placed in the same line with the word *inhuman*. This forms a contrast between the human world and the natural one. The lyrical subject hears the songstress' song as a potent act of solipsistic creativity. As "the single artificer of the world / [i]n which she sang" (Steven, "Idea" 106), the songstress appears to replace nature's voice; however, her song has not been able to replace the world. As the sea, a natural phenomenon, lacks consciousness of itself, it knows neither the human songs it engenders nor its wordless songs (Voros 71). The song was, in fact, more than the dark voice of the sea and the outer voice of sky and cloud for Stevens. It was

> More even than her voice, and ours, among
> The *meaningles*s plungings of water and the wind,

> Theatrical distances, bronze shadows heaped
> On high horizons, mountainous atmospheres
> Of sky and sea. (Steven, "Idea" 105; emphasis added)

The "plungings of water and the wind" were "meaningless" for two reasons. They were "not ours" and therefore "inhuman." However, later in this poem, the ocean's cry and the water's plungings were transmuted into a meaningful shape in the songstress' song.

Guy Rotella argues that this poem "celebrates" the power of the imagination to turn nature's meaningless indifference into significant measures as Stevens explores "the relationship between the human imagination and natural reality" (119-20) and makes efforts to turn nature's meaningless indifference into significant measures, e.g., to help us readers hear the ocean's constant cry, while finding "his voice in voicing voicelessness" (110). Stevens hopes for "an intensity of negation in nature that would move him to fuller speech" that would in turn shape nature significantly (110). Rotella concludes that the implied narrative of this poem is a "conventionally romantic one" (120).

Although man's need to "converse with" nature is strong in Stevens (Rotella 113), I do not think nature "requires constant undoing" to make its plea (113). Stevens does not hope for an intensity of negation in nature because it would move him to fuller speech to shape nature. Neither does he celebrate the imagination's power in a "conventionally romantic" way. For one thing, Stevens does not make nature sing. It was the unidentified songstress that sang. For another, nature's sounds only become meaningful in the form of human language, be it in the songstress' song or Stevens' poetry. The implied narrative of this poem may seem "conventionally romantic" as Rotella argues, but what we readers hear in this poem is in fact the misery in "the sound of the land" (Stevens, "Snow Man" 8).

As this poem shows how Stevens reimagines nature's sounds and reflects on the possibility of different languages, his concern here is a modernist one. He foregrounds the limitations of language as a form of communication. Moreover, he seeks to formulate a dialectical relationship between the sound of poetic words and nature's sounds. In this poem, Stevens also acknowledges the limits of human perception and consciousness (Voros 147) and expresses the crisis of modernism in terms of "humanity's disquieting and vexed relationship

to the natural world" (3). Moving from the romantic to the phenomenological, Stevens has "reformulate[d] the power of the imagination as a power within rather than over Nature" (17).

> The song and water were not medleyed sound
> Even if what she sang was what she heard,
> Since what she sang was uttered *word by word*.
> . . .
> But it was she and not the sea we heard.
> (Steven, "Idea" 105; emphasis added)

As the song and water were "not medleyed sound," nature remains distinct from culture, communicating mutely in a nonhuman language and therefore making "a mute speech" (Lakritz 13). It was "not the sea we heard" (Stevens, "Idea" 105) because the constant cry was not uttered word by word and therefore was "not ours" (105). We readers only hear the sea's inhuman and wordless cry in Stevens' word-by-word poetry. Stevens' "apparent fastidious attention" (Lakritz 14) to the two separate languages, man's word-by-word speech and the language nature speaks "without articulate meaning being conveyed" (12), strengthens the dialectical relationship between the lyrical subject's poetic language and the ocean's wordless cry.

This poem is a good example of how Stevens conceives the dialectical relationship between the sounds of the earth and the sound of the imagination's powers of words. It uses negation to expand from the singer first to the song, then to Ramon Fernandez's views on the song, and last to the power of the song. The song goes through stages to trace how the spirit of the song modifies substance and then reabsorbs substance into spirit. In this dialectical relationship, nature's sounds become meaningful because they are in the sound of poetic words and the human voice. Stevens circumscribes the psychological world of a unified persona, enabling the reader to poetically experience multiple voices that activate feelings and thoughts. As his later poetry demonstrates, nature's mournful sounds convey articulate meaning. Because man's word-by-word speech and the sounds nature makes are two separate languages, man cannot understand the saying of nature's mournful sounds. This point can be further elaborated in "Less and Less Human, O Savage Spirit."

V. The Saying of the Incommunicable Mass

By the time "Less and Less Human, O Savage Spirit" was published, it was eleven years after the publication of "The Idea of Order at Key West." Although Stevens' conception of how nature communicates with man in mournful sounds had not yet grown to maturity, he had become able to poeticize the earth as the "incommunicable mass," from which the human "demands his speech" and "[o]f which we are too distantly a part" (Stevens, "Less" 288). Stevens begins this poem with a conditional, followed by an imperative sentence, contrasting two images of the "god in the house" (288). The first image is a god saying things in the house, a symbol of the constructiveness of human civilization.

> If there must be a god in the house, must be,
> *Saying* things in the rooms and on the stair,
>
> Let him move as the sunlight moves on the floor,
> Or moonlight, *silently*, as Plato's ghost
>
> Or Aristotle's skeleton. Let him hang out
> His stars on the wall. He must dwell *quietly*.
> (Stevens, "Less" 288; emphasis added)

It is of interest to me that Stevens uses the word *let* twice here as it could mean either to allow something to happen or to show that one accepts an unfavorable situation that is going to happen. Not only does the lyrical subject let the "god in the house" move silently, he also "[l]et him hang out / [h]is stars on the wall." One can sense the lyrical subject's frustration at having to accept a god into the house. Stevens concludes this image of the "god in the house" by insisting that "[h]e must dwell quietly." In other words, this god has to be silent and is silenced. He is accepted into the house on the condition that he dwells quietly. Furthermore, Stevens cleverly places *moonligh*t, *silently* and *Plato's ghost* in the same line. These images strengthen the importance of the words *silently* and *quietly*. Although Plato's ghost and Aristotle's skeleton move *silently* and *quietly*, we feel the weight of their pressing presence because Plato and Aristotle are two of the most important ancient Greek philosophers.

Without human speech, they too are wordless and voiceless. This invites the reader to probe deeper into the meaning of the silenced god.

This poem is an invocation addressed to the Savage Spirit, "the personification of nonhuman Nature," Voros argues (75); therefore, this god is "incapable of speaking in human speech" (75). As this poem is Stevens' refutation of romanticism and the pathetic fallacy, the function of poetic imagination is not to humanize nature but to "relocate itself within Nature without [the] benefit of [the] pathetic fallacy" (76). Stevens' desire for a silent god in this poem does not arise from his distrust of language. Rather, he recognizes language as a function of human consciousness that isolates man from nature. Invoking "an appropriate god" that would neither speak nor hear, Stevens "refutes the idea that humanity is created in God's image" and rejects a human-centered view of the universe (75). As romanticism had relocated the gods in nature, Stevens first considers the absence of the gods as many romanticists or his contemporary poets did and then appreciates the absence of man in nature.

However, Stevens uses the present simple tense in this poem. He not only personifies but also deifies nonhuman nature as the Savage Spirit. Despite his distrust of language, which for him is in fact a function of human consciousness that isolates man from nature, Stevens demands nature, the incommunicable mass, to speak in human terms. Stevens sees poetry as the intermediary between nature and man, but does not see poetry as the power to humanize nature. Rather, Stevens here reveals the earth's incommunicability. Because of his distrust of human language, Stevens here pays "fastidious attention" (Lakritz 14) to the language nature speaks. Paradoxically, man "demands his speech" from the "incommunicable mass" (Stevens, "Less" 288) so as to communicate with it.

> It is the human that is the alien,
> The human that has no cousin in the moon.
>
> It is the human that demands his speech
> From beasts or from the incommunicable mass.
> (Stevens, "Less" 288)

The lyrical subject specifically points out man's place in the natural world. The human is "the alien" because he "has no cousin in the moon." Having no relations in the moon, the alien human is "too distantly a part" of the earth upon which he dwells. Nonetheless, the human "demands his speech" from the "incommunicable mass." The image of the alien human forms a further contrast with the second image of the "god in the house" that is to be "a coolness," "[a] vermilioned nothingness," and "any stick of the mass / [o]f which we are too distantly a part" (Stevens, "Less" 288). Stevens makes a pun on "a part" and the word *apart*. Also, the juxtaposition of *beasts* and *the incommunicable mass* indicates their equal importance and direct relation. As a noun, the word *mass* can refer to a large amount of something that has no particular shape or arrangement. In physics, it refers to the amount of matter in any solid object or any volume of liquid or gas. As the human demands beasts that live on the earth to speak his language, I consider the incommunicable mass to be the earth upon which beasts dwell.

What is peculiar in "Less and Less Human, O Savage Spirit" is nature's fundamentally incommunicable experience, the experience of trying to speak silently and being unable to say things except in poetic representation. Stevens' use of the word *incommunicable* might suggest that for him something is communicable and is in need of communication. It is also likely that Stevens has already conceived a mass that is communicable. However, in this poem what is communicable in Stevens' poetic world is still unknown. It is also unknowable how the mass communicates and what it tries to communicate. Lastly, what would happen when the alien human is no longer too distantly a part but simply part of the incommunicable mass? To answer these questions, it is to "Angel Surrounded by Paysans" we now turn.

VI. The Repetitions of Half-meanings of the Earth's Tragic Drone: The Necessary Angel of Earth and the Man-locked Set

Published three years after "Less and Less Human, O Savage Spirit," "Angel Surrounded by Paysans" not only revisits the theme of the incommunicability of nature's sounds but also shows how one can respond to it. In his dialogue with one of the countrymen, the necessary angel tries to persuade the countrymen that they can see the earth "[c]leared of its stiff and stubborn, man-locked set" and "hear its tragic drone / [r]ise liquidly in liquid

lingerings" in his sight and hearing (Stevens, "Paysans" 423).[6] I would like to emphasize two points. The first is that the earth only mourns in "tragic drone" in the necessary angel's hearing. The second point, more closely related to our concerns in this article, is that the indistinct sounds the earth makes begin to take the form of human language.

> Yet I am the necessary angel of earth,
> Since, in my sight, you see the earth again,
>
> Cleared of its stiff and stubborn, man-locked set,
> And, *in my hearing,* you hear its *tragic* drone
>
> Rise liquidly in liquid lingerings,
> *Like watery words awash*; like meanings said
>
> By repetitions of half-meanings.
> (Stevens, "Paysans" 423; emphasis added)

The seemingly meaningless repetitions of the *r* and *l* sounds in "Rise liquidly in liquid lingerings" and the *w* sounds in "Like watery words awash" meticulously correspond to the low continuous and monotonous noise of the drone, but in fact nature's sounds are no longer meaningless. Like the inhuman and meaningless "plungings of water and the wind" that become meaningful in the songstress' song, the earth's drone is transmuted into a meaningful shape, rising like "meanings said / [b]y repetitions of half-meanings" in the necessary angel's hearing. Although it rises like "watery words awash," the earth's drone is not "uttered word by word." Unable to use the countrymen's daily language or the necessary angel's poetic language, the earth still communicates in "so much less than speech" (Stevens, "Region" 472). As the earth's drone begins to take the form of human language, nature's sounds should have become more

[6] Even though the poem takes the form of a dialogue, it is more like a dramatic monologue as it is developed mostly in the angel's point of view. Also, the poem closes at the end of the angel's response; the countryman does not further respond to the angel. This could suggest that the countryman does not know how to respond to these sounds and the necessary angel's revelation because the meaning of his poetic revelation is concealed from the countryman as his daily word-by-word language, though part of human language, is not poetry.

comprehensible and less incommunicable to the countrymen; however, this is not the case.

Focusing on the necessary angel being one of the countrymen, this scene's understatement is that the countrymen, in order to communicate with the incommunicable mass and understand the saying of the earth's drone, must learn both the language nature speaks and the language the necessary angel uses. As the dialogue takes the form of poetry, I argue that it is only in poetry that the countrymen can know what is concealed in nature's incommunicability. To borrow Benjamin's words, the necessary angel, as one of the countrymen, plays the role of the translator: Man as a translator of the language of nature needs "to liberate the language imprisoned in a work in his re-creation of that work" (Benjamin, "Task" 261) and translates "the language of things into that of man" (Benjamin, "On" 69). Knowing what the earth communicates, he insists on his right to speak for nature in the face of the countrymen and translate the earth's drone into what is communicable to them, i.e., the speech the alien human demands. To complicate matters further, he uses poetic language.

> I am one of you and being one of you
> Is being and knowing what I am and know.
> (Stevens, "Paysans" 423)

The necessary angel is part of a community that is composed of the alien human. He is also apart from that community. He too is the alien human that is at once too distantly a part of the incommunicable mass. This is why he can help his fellow countrymen understand the earth's tragic drone, even if the earth's drone only becomes tragic in his hearing. However, as he is gone "too quickly" and only "[s]een for *the* moment standing in the door" (Stevens, "Paysans" 423; emphasis added), he finds it urgent to communicate the earth's tragic drone with the countrymen and help them "see the earth again."

> Am I not,
> Myself, only half of a figure of a sort,
>
> A figure half seen, or seen for a moment, a man
> Of the mind, an apparition apparelled in

> Apparels of such lightest look that a turn
> Of my shoulder and quickly, too quickly, I am gone?
> (Stevens, "Paysans" 423)

This question underlines the importance of the angel's being in the world and emphasizes two points. First, it emphasizes that he is not an everlasting being. Stevens specifically points out that he is not an angel with "a tepid aureole," "ashen wing" or "wear of ore" (Stevens, "Paysans" 423). This depiction of an angel, Stevens argues in "Two or Three Ideas" (1951), is only a part of the human imagination and "merely aesthetic projections" (843). Second, the question emphasizes that the time of the angel's being in the world is brief. He is an angel of immanence. For this reason, he must tell the countrymen what needs to be said soon.

As he comes from the earth, dwells on the earth among the countrymen and speaks directly to them rather than those undergoing the disillusionment of ten o'clock, the spirituality of the angel of immanence lies in the fact that he helps the countrymen find the earth's concealed poeticity. The authority of the necessary angel consists in his having gone from being one of the countrymen to a state that gives content to his teachings. Undergoing this transformation renders his teachings authoritative. The insight achieved by the necessary angel's personal enlightenment leads him to speak directly to the countrymen because they have a more direct and intimate relationship with the earth. It is the countrymen who labor on the farms, cultivate crops and harvest them. Nevertheless, the countrymen can neither hear nor comprehend the earth's tragic drone. Because of this irony, it is necessary for the angel of earth to help the countrymen find poeticity in the incommunicable mass and hear its mournful sounds. By responding to the earth's tragic drone and answering the countryman's question in poetic language, the angel of earth shows the possibility of dwelling poetically.

VII. That Which Is Not Yet Knowledge: The Busy Cry of Leaves That Concerns Someone Else

In the 1950s, Stevens was in the final phase of his poetic career and yet he allowed his poetic energy to flow in poems like "The Course of a Particular" and "The Region November." These two poems revisit the earth's tragic drone

and its communicability. As Stevens was older, he found it even more urgent to express his concern. In "The Course of a Particular," nature again makes mournful sounds. "[T]he leaves cry," Stevens emphasizes (460); they do not sing or chant. Furthermore, the cry of the leaves now bears "meaning more / [t]han they are in the final finding of the ear" and "in the thing / [i]tself" (460):

> Today the leaves cry, hanging on branches swept by wind,
> Yet the nothingness of winter becomes a little less.
> It is still full of icy shades and shapen snow. (460)

Although this is a poem of the coming winter, it is rather the opening word *today* that is of interest to me. As Stevens is older now, the use of *today* creates a sense of urgency. Another word worthy of note is *cry*. As a verb, the word *cry* can mean to shed tears or shout in fear, grief, distress or sorrow and to utter inarticulate sounds of lamentation or suffering loudly. This word increases the importance of the word *today*. Today, one finally hears the leaves cry. Also, this tercet reminds us of "The Snow Man," in which Stevens insists that "[o]ne must have a mind of winter" not to think "[o]f any misery in the sound of the wind, / [i]n the sound of a few leaves" (8). Both poems, composed of "fifteen lines in tercets," describe the evolution of "one" to "no one" (Lensing 145). The "pivotal sense" in both poems is "hearing" (Voros 141). Despite these similarities, there are some drastic changes in how Stevens conceives of man's relationship with nature in "The Course of a Particular."

> The leaves cry . . . One holds off and merely hears the cry.
> It is a busy cry, concerning someone else.
> (Stevens, "Course" 460)

Unlike the "meaningless plungings of water" and the ocean's constant cry "[t]hat was not ours," one "holds off and merely hears" the busy cry. As the cry concerns someone else, it becomes meaningful. The recurrent phrase "the leaves cry" shows that the leaves on the branches and the winter wind communicate by crying and making sounds to express their grief and pain. The juxtaposition of "The leaves cry" and "One holds off and merely hears the cry" in the second tercet indicates the importance for a person to stop what he is doing and wait before he "merely hears the cry" of the leaves. Even though the

cry of the leaves is not "uttered word by word," the listener is attentive to nature's mournful sounds now. Man remains apart from nature, but he still tries to understand the earth's tragic drone and interact with it. This unknown person must be someone who can find poeticity in nature and transmute nature's sounds into a meaningful shape. The poem's concluding sentence demonstrates this point. Stevens divides this sentence into four poetic lines:

> It is the cry of leaves that do not transcend themselves,
>
> In the absence of fantasia, without meaning more
> Than they are in the final finding of the ear, in the thing
> Itself, until, at last, the cry concerns no one at all.
> (Stevens, "Course" 460)

This concluding sentence is an end-stopped line, separated into two tercets. These last four poetic lines not only explain why the leaves cry but also answer why the cry is not a cry of "divine attention," "the smoke-drift of puffed-out heroes" or a "human cry" (Stevens, "Course" 460). The reader has to interrupt his reading to understand this sentence. Compared with a period that ends a sentence, each of these commas indicates a smaller break that separates ideas within this sentence. Each of these lines has its own unit of sense and ends in a comma that indicates a soft pause. The reader pauses at each punctuation mark. This syntax causes the sense of the first poetic line, "It is the cry of leaves that do not transcend themselves," to make a pause at its close. As Stevens opens the last tercet with "In the absence of fantasia," we may also read the last tercet as being independent of its previous line.

The last tercet points out the crucial place fantasia occupies in this poem. Although the moment where the cry finally "concerns no one at all" is the poem's "terminal point" (Harrison 102), I consider the phrase "In the absence of fantasia" to be the poem's focal point. As Joseph Carroll rightly shows, the self and the world, i.e., the two aspects of particularity, are equivalently meaningless in the absence of fantasia (307). Therefore, I think Stevens wants the reader to make a pause and pay special attention to the line "In the absence of fantasia." He does not expel "fantasia" from "a scene of merciless winter severity" as George S. Lensing argues (145).

Reflecting upon the radical reduction of the self in the poem's finale, Lensing considers Stevens' self-cancellation as being epistemological rather than homicidal (147). For Lensing, "the final 'absence of fantasia' can be attained only by an absence of the perceiving self" (147). As the poem ends with "simple absence" and Stevens' self-cancellation, the poem arrives at the affirmation that the leaves' cry transcends nothing without meaning more than they are (147). As Stevens concludes the poem with "the cry concerns no one at all," it is understandable why Lensing argues that this poem describes the evolution of "one" to "no one" and expels "fantasia" from "a scene of merciless winter severity" (145). However, in this poem Stevens stresses the significance of fantasia and the need for it.

I have demonstrated in my discussion of "Angel Surrounded by Paysans" that the earth drone only becomes tragic in the hearing of the necessary angel. Similarly, the cry of the leaves "that do not transcend themselves" concerns no one because it takes place in "the absence of fantasia." In itself, the cry of the leaves that do not transcend themselves concerns no one at all because nature is never dependent on man or his poetic imagination. The natural world exists with or without man and his poetic imagination. Contrarily, man is dependent on the earth. Although man remains apart from nature, nature needs to concern someone. Man also needs poetry so that he can give expression to nature and interact with its mournful sounds. In the expression of the imagination and the sound of its words, nature's mournful sounds concern someone and mean more than they are in the final finding of the ear and in the thing itself.

VIII. Conclusion: The Swaying Sound of the North Wind and Its Saying

In "The Region November," Stevens made his last attempt to poeticize the incommunicability of nature's sounds by staging a dialogue between the north wind and treetops. The treetops swept by the north wind make loud and deep sounds that are not more than mere sounds. The treetops sway in an effort, expressing opinions, e.g., "of God, the world / [a]nd human nature" (Stevens, "Region" 473), though they are saying "in so much less than speech" (472) and "[o]n the level of that which is not yet knowledge" (473). As Stevens aged, the saying of the earth's tragic drone became the more dominant voice in his poetry. The two opening lines again reinforce the incommunicability of nature's sounds:

It is hard to hear the north wind again,
And to watch the treetops, as they sway. (472)

The first line directly points out the difficulty of hearing the north wind again. The second line paradoxically creates the poetic effect that supports the statement that "It is hard to hear the north wind again." Stevens does not use words related to sound to help the reader hear the north wind. Rather, he uses the word *watch* to make a sharp contrast between sight and sound. One can hear the treetops making sounds as he watches them sway in the north wind, but reading the second line also accentuates the act of observing treetops swaying without hearing any sounds. The present simple tense of "It is hard" not only emphasizes time in the present but also refers to things that are taking place at the time when the lyrical subject speaks. Stevens does not open this poem with "It is impossible to hear the north wind again." This means that it is possible, and it must be possible, for him to know what the treetops and the north wind are saying. Therefore, the word *again* does two things. First, it shows that the listener heard the north wind before. Second, it reminds us of the necessary angel who helps the countrymen "see the earth again" and hear its tragic drone. The reason why it is hard to hear the north wind again is that the listener, whether he is the snow man who listens in the snow or the human that is the alien to the earth, is too distantly a part of the incommunicable mass. It is also because the listener can no longer hear the earth's drone in the hearing of the necessary angel as he is too quickly gone.

They sway, deeply and loudly, in an effort,
So much less than feeling, so much less than speech,
Saying and saying, the way things say
On the level of that which is not yet knowledge.
(Stevens, "Region" 472-73)

Stevens uses the alliteration, repetition and rhyme of *say* and *sway* to create the sound effect of treetops swaying. It is as if Stevens is verbally echoing the sounds of the north wind and the treetops. The cacophonous sound, the "deeply and loudly" rustling noise of the swaying treetops and the howling wind paradoxically suggest the way of nature. The word *say* is used without an object, meaning to declare or express an opinion. In a rather futile effort, the

north wind and the swaying treetops are saying something. As Helen Vendler demonstrates, the trees say only one thing, displaying "the melancholy of the contentless . . . void of any substance, divine, material, or human" and depicting "a waste land of spiritual entropy" (197). Stevens agglutinatively elaborates "the meaningless into a repetitive swaying and a predicateless saying" (198).

However, I do not think the saying of the north wind and the swaying treetops, i.e., the assertion nature makes, is "predicateless" as Vendler argues. Rather, the north wind and the treetops sway to say, expressing an opinion and making its plea. The saying of the north wind and the treetops is "[a] revelation not yet intended" (Stevens, "Region" 473) as it is "so much less than speech" (472) and therefore "[o]n the level of which is not yet knowledge" (473). "[L]ike a critic of God, the world / [a]nd human nature," the "revelation not yet intended" is "pensively seated / [o]n the waste throne of its own wilderness" (473). The phrase "pensively seated" strengthens the oxymoronic characteristic of the swaying treetops. The incommunicable mass thinks in muteness as it lacks human speech. Also, it makes sounds to not only express opinions of but also make judgments on these social constructs. This image creates a contrast between the movement of the swaying treetops and the stillness of nature's sovereignty in its wasted, if not untamed, wilderness. It also reminds the reader of the jar in Tennessee, man's alienation from nature and his attempt to take "dominion everywhere" (Stevens, "Jar" 61).

> Deeplier, deeplier, loudlier, loudlier,
> The trees are swaying, swaying, swaying.
> (Stevens, "Region" 473)

The word *swaying* appears three times at the end of the poem. This creates the effect of the trees making echoing sounds in the wind while their voices, or voicelessness, are dissolving in the wind. Stevens repeats the rhyming of *deeply* and *loudly* and uses the comparative form of these two words to intensify the futile and frustrating efforts the north wind and treetops make in order to say. The rhythm of these two words thus reinforces the sound effect of desperation as the rhythms and rhymes of the repeated words are intended to extricate the semantic meaning of these natural sounds. Nonetheless, the earth communicates in the treetops' swaying. Like the busy cry of leaves in "The Course of a Particular," the north wind and treetops speak in a less than human

and thus uncommunicative speech to man. The elusive and evasive swaying of treetops dissolves into the wind, turning into another "nothingness of winter" (Stevens, "Course" 460). Although nature makes deeplier and loudlier sounds, what nature communicates cannot be heard. This is because the lyrical subject of this poem describes a natural scene without a human present. Stevens again adapts an impersonal voicing to reveal his personal care for the earth and its incommunicability and finds his voice in voicing nature's voicelessness.

As the earth perishes, no man can be. Stevens' voice in his poetry on the sounds of the incommunicable mass remains potent to this day and sheds new light on the relationship man can have with the earth. In Stevens, the expression of the imagination and the sound of its words help us hear again the earth's incommunicability and reconsider our relationship with the earth. I hope my reading will enact a "sensuous awakening" that "create[s] concise moments of sound" for the reader "to listen expectantly," in the way the structures of assonance and consonance in some of Stevens' *Harmonium* poems have already done (Maeder 28), and instigates the reader's imagination "to make a commitment" "to respond humanly" as he has done in "The Course of a Particular" (Schwarz 210).

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