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**Fixing a fleeting world: A study of the auditory imagination in  
Valéry and Stevens**

**Goldfarb, Lisa Nan, Ph.D.**

**City University of New York, 1991**

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**FIXING A FLEETING WORLD:  
A STUDY OF THE AUDITORY IMAGINATION IN VALÉRY AND STEVENS**

by

**LISA GOLDFARB**

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in  
Comparative Literature in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,  
The City University of New York.

1991

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For as long as I can remember, I have longed to unite the two strongest interests in my life -- literature and music. This dissertation is the first product of years of contemplating the relationship between these arts. Yet, as Virginia Woolf suggests in A Room of One's Own, creative works are not achieved in isolation, but are the results of the labor of many people (other writers in particular), this study, too, though hardly of the magnitude of the works of which Woolf writes, is dependent upon the guidance and work of others. I thank all the members of my committee for their careful readings of my chapters and for their gentle criticism. I thank Mary Ann Caws for her continuous belief in my ability to carry my work to its completion, for her insistence, even at my most self-doubting moments, upon how important it is to remain true to one's own idea. I thank Hanna Charney, whose book, Le scepticisme de Valéry, first opened my eyes to the beauty and complexity of Valéry's prose, for the time she spent with me discussing the possible shapes this work might have taken. I thank Fred Nichols for both the insightful reading he gave to each chapter, and for the kind encouragement he offered during the rockier periods of the writing. Finally, I thank Burton Pike, an "unofficial" reader, for the extra time he gave to the

reading of my work.

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## INTRODUCTION

Paul Valéry and Wallace Stevens are both philosophical and musical poets, yet critics who compare them often address these aspects of their work separately. Those who focus on their ideas tend to see their musicality as adornment, while those who devote attention to musicality often overlook the ideas that their musical figures and structures suggest. This study addresses the relationship between music and idea in the work of Valéry and Stevens; its premise is that both poets' ideas about and uses of music (and sound) embody their primary philosophical concerns.

Valéry's and Stevens' poems, at first sight, seem more marked by differences than similarities. Certainly, Valéry's traditional forms and strict rhythms, and his use of figures of ancient myths -- gods, nymphs, fairies -- evoke a world remote from the world that Stevens presents in his poetry. Bereft of the gods and the transcendence that such figures suggest, Stevens offers us a picture of the mental and physical world in the wake of the gods' disappearance -- a world filled with all the richness and possibility of nature -- its bold colors and dissonant sounds, as well as its bleaker and sometimes barren underside.

The world that Valéry and Stevens present in their poems may differ vastly, yet the philosophical questions that they pose are remarkably similar. From their earliest to their latest poems, and

in essay after essay, Valéry and Stevens wrestle with similar questions: How do we define ourselves in relation to the ever-moving world external to ourselves? Is there such a thing as fixity, as permanence or wholeness in a world that appears ever-changing? What is the relationship between the physical world and our metaphysical perceptions of that world? How does our consciousness shape the external world? In Valéry's "La Jeune Parque," it is one of the three Fates of classical antiquity who struggles with her desire to be part of what changes and also part of a larger permanence, who is caught in the eternal struggle between the mutable and the immutable, while in Stevens' "Sunday Morning," it is the human figure of a woman who probes the relationship between "April's green" and the "idea of paradise." (1) Yet both poets probe similar questions in these poems, and these questions recur in poem after poem.

If the parallel between these two poets ended with their intellectual similarities, with their concern with similar philosophical issues, it would still be difficult to justify a comparison between them, given the more glaring distinctions in the poetic worlds that they present. More striking than these similar abstract issues, however, is the way in which they pose these issues, the way in which they wrestle with these abstract questions in their poems. Both Valéry and Stevens are as musical as they are

abstract. To say that they are musical is not only to point out the rhythmic quality of their poems or the abundant musical images and figures -- flutes, trumpets, keyboards -- that sound through their poems. Rather, both poets have much more far-reaching concepts of musicality; both have a complex understanding of voicing and tonality and both often pattern their poetic forms on musical models -- such as the recitative in Valéry's case, and variations in Stevens' work. Yet, neither Valéry nor Stevens employs these figures and forms of music simply to experiment with poetic structure; rather, in the case of both poets, it is precisely their use and understanding of the auditory nature of poetry and their notions of music that allow them to probe the abstract concerns that they have most in common.

Valéry's critics have long acknowledged both the abstract and musical dimensions in his work -- both in prose and in poetry. Any study of Valéry relies upon Jean Hytier's examination of Valéry's poetics. (I have found his discussion of Valéry's understanding of musical and psychological resonance particularly clear and helpful).

(2) In his readings of poems, particularly of "La Jeune Parque," Francis Scarfe has shown how central Valéry's shifts in voicing are to the overall meaning of the poems (3), and James Lawler, too, illustrates how Valéry uses sound and repetitions as modes of analysis in his poems. (4) Yet, it is only recently that Valéry's

ideas and uses of music have been given the full attention that they deserve. In contrast to earlier critics, Christine Crow maintains that Valéry's conception of voice is central to both the method and meaning of his poems. According to Crow, Valéry's voice is not only a gloss to meaning, it is a "key to the action creative of self." She writes, "Valéry's part intuitive - part analytic theory of voice leads us to appreciate the overwhelming role of the sensibility in his poetry, and with the sensibility, of a form of expressive desire which virtually becomes the subject of the poetry itself." (5) Brian Stimpson extends Crow's theory of voice to include Valéry's concept of music as a whole and maintains that "a study of techniques of composition leads to the very heart of the creative process" in Valéry's work. (6)

Stevens' critics, too, have noted the philosophical and musical aspects of his work; yet, in Stevens' case, it is difficult to cite critics who discuss the relationship between formal and philosophical issues. Broadly speaking, those who are most helpful in elucidating Stevens' ideas -- Vendler, Pearce, Hillis Miller, just to name a very few -- do not often relate these ideas to the poet's musicality. (7) What Eleanor Cook writes of "word-play" in Stevens' poems might well be applied to his musical figures and structures: "Word-play is not necessarily trivial. On the contrary, it can be the best way of approximating in words some of

the most vital and mysterious parts of our lives." (8)

While most critics agree that Stevens' work shows the mark of his interest in Valéry, most comparative studies tend to treat philosophical and musical issues separately. On the basis of his detailed studies of the philosophical distinctions between Mallarmé and Stevens, Michel Benamou dismisses Valéry's importance for Stevens. (9) Harold Bloom traces Stevens' notion of the "first idea," in part, to Valéry, yet he does not relate this idea to either poet's understanding of musicality. (10) On the musical side of the critical spectrum, Edward Kessler maintains that the similarity of Valéry and Stevens is revealed in their poetic method, yet he tends to focus more on the formal similarities between these two poets than on the ideas that they suggest through their musical methods. (11) Such a division between the musical and philosophical approach is again expressed as recently as 1986, in Frank Warnke's article on Rilke, Valéry and Stevens. Warnke convincingly places all three poets in the tradition of meditative lyric poetry, yet, at the close of his article he suggests that the incantatory aspect of their work is to be seen separately from its meditative aspects. He writes, "The last observation points to a final paradox. The poetry of High Modernism, of which Valéry, Rilke and Stevens are all eminent practitioners, is remarkable for its intense intellectualism, its learned allusiveness. And yet, at the same

time, it is deeply primitive, akin to magic incantations from which lyric poetry, presumably, originally emerged..." (12)

To separate the intellectualism of Valéry and Stevens from their music, to divide their attention to sound from the ideas with which they wrestle in their poems is to overlook Valéry's own understanding of the relation between music and thought and, consequently, to miss the most pervasive Valéryan echo in Stevens' work. In this study I aim to unite the discussion of music and idea in the work of Valéry and Stevens. I will illustrate how Valéry's ideas and uses of music and sound in poetry allow him to articulate some of his most elusive philosophical ideas, and I will argue that it is precisely Valéry's grasp of the unity of sound and idea in poetry that resonates both in Stevens' ideas of poetry and in his poems.

## NOTES

- (1) Wallace Stevens, "Sunday Morning" in The Palm at the End of the Mind (New York: Vintage Books, 1972) p.6
- (2) Jean Hytier, La Poétique de Valéry (Paris: A. Colin, 1970) pp.83, 104, 292
- (3) Francis Scarfe, The Art of Paul Valéry; A Study in Dramatic Monologue (London: The Athelone Press, 1978) p.171
- (4) James Lawler, The Poet as Analyst: Essays on Paul Valéry (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974)
- (5) Christine Crow, Paul Valéry and the Poetry of Voice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) p.xvi, p.43
- (6) Brian Stimpson, Paul Valéry and Music; A Study of the Techniques of Composition in Valéry's Poetry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) p.4
- (7) R.H. Pearce and J. H. Miller eds., The Act of the Mind; Essays on the Poetry of Wallace Stevens (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1969) The essays in this volume by Vendler, Pearce and Miller remain among the most helpful in elucidating Stevens' ideas.
- (8) Eleanor Cook, Poetry, Word-Play, and Word-War in Wallace Stevens (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1988) p.5
- (9) Michel Benamou, Wallace Stevens and the Symbolist Imagination (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972) p.145-46 Benamou writes: "...because Valéry is so derivative from Poe, Baudelaire, and Mallarmé, a parallel study with Stevens leads to duplication....The opposition between Stevens and Valéry is exactly the same as the opposition between Stevens and Mallarmé."
- (10) Harold Bloom, Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977) p.53
- (11) Edward Kessler, Images of Wallace Stevens (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1972)

(12) Frank Warnke, "Rilke, Valéry, Stevens: The Meditative Imagination and the Lyric" in Ueda, Matoto (ed) Explorations: Essays in Comparative Literature (Lanham, Md.: UPs of America, 1986) p.21

## Chapter One

### Ideas of Music and Sound In Valéry's Prose

Paul Valéry is most often critically viewed as a highly abstract poet and thinker. Throughout his work, he focuses on the mobility of the world and on our ability to express the fleeting nature of the world and of the human mind in a finite form. He devotes a large portion of his essays and notebooks to the question of how various art forms and intellectual systems can represent the universe in flux. Valéry often turns to art forms and disciplines other than poetry to help make his thinking on this matter more precise. He is drawn to philosophy, yet he maintains that because philosophical questions are bound by discursive language, which in turn reflects the changing nature of the mind and world, philosophers cannot accurately pose their own questions. Valéry admires the method of mathematics, and finds precision in the language of geometry and algebra. But it is in music that he discovers a model of artistic and intellectual expression. Because it is a temporal art form based on an already established system of pure sound, Valéry believes music can best represent the mobility of the mind and world. Consequently, he frequently raises and analyzes his most persistent poetic and philosophic concerns with a musical framework in mind.

Concerned with music and sound throughout his prose, Valéry does not simply refer to music as the pure art form he emulates. In his essays, on such diverse subjects as Descartes, sculpture, aesthetics and poetics, Valéry sometimes discusses the power of orchestral music and at other times he probes the oral origins and the auditory basis of poetry. Valéry's notebooks also reflect his attraction to music; he discusses in many entries the structural elements of music he aspires to incorporate into poetry. This chapter aims to catalog and analyze Valéry's many comments about the world of sound. Starting with his most general responses to music as a listener, the first part of this study will focus on Valéry's comparisons between music and poetry, and explore his understanding of the auditory nature of poetry. For a better understanding of how Valéry transposes musical form into poetry, the second part of this chapter will examine his philosophic concerns, look at how music addresses these concerns, and explore how Valéry forges a poetic theory, founded, to a large degree, on his musical understanding.

Valéry's experience of music as a listener pervades his writing, and he continually proclaims its power. He traces his interest in music to his early years as a Symbolist poet when he and other young poets would attend the Lamoureux concerts. Music offered them a belief in the "valeur universelle des émotions de l'Art," and further, a belief in the unity that art represented to

them: "Nous avons senti, et ce que nous avons senti nous donnait la force de résister à toutes les occasions de dispersion et à toutes les niaiseries et maléfices de la vie." (1) For Valéry, music was not only a valuable aesthetic experience; it represented the possibility for unity in a fragmented world.

Valéry underscores the value of the unity that music creates among the audience in his essay "Au Concert Lamoureux en 1893." In his homage to the Lamoureux concerts, he refers to the hall itself as "cette forêt essentiellement magique," and compares the poverty of his own language, as a writer, to the potential richness of the language of orchestral music: "Comment s'explique donc mon sacrilège, et cette introduction d'un écrivain, et de sa parole plane et pauvre dans ce sanctuaire." (2) So strong is his belief in the unifying power of music that Valéry writes that the "certitude" and "puissance" of music create among the audience in the concert hall "la condition religieuse par excellence, l'unité sensible d'une pluralité vivante." (3)

At the same time as he points to music's ability to draw us together, Valéry asserts the tremendous effect it has on our individual emotions. For each listener, "Elle joue des profondeurs de la vie, des extrêmes de la passion, imite les combinaisons de la pensée, semble remuer la nature; agite, apaise, parcourt tout le système des nerfs..." (4) Music, Valéry insists, can be so forceful

that, in affecting our thoughts and feelings, it draws us away from the pattern of our daily lives and into a world of its own: "[Elle] nous tisse un temps de fausse vie en effleurant les touches de la vraie." (5)

In his essays concerned with aesthetics and poetics, Valéry elaborates on the powerful inner effect that music has on us. He believes that, largely, because of the musical property of modulation, music can reflect our own changing states.

Parfois, le dessin et la modulation sont si conformes aux lois intimes de nos changements d'état qu'ils font songer d'en être des formules auditives exactes, et qui pourraient servir de modèles pour une étude objective des phénomènes subjectifs les plus subtils. (6)

According to Valéry, the changing of musical keys enables the composer to achieve subtle emotional shifts. Because of this intrinsic capacity, he believes that music, of all the arts, can most accurately represent the changing nature of our inner world.

Music is not only a powerful art form in itself; for Valéry it becomes a paradigm for artistic creation. Referring to his Symbolist years, Valéry writes that the Symbolist ambition of trying to exploit the musical properties of language led him to ponder the process of art itself: "Ce souci musical, et quelques autres qui s'y joignirent, me jetèrent dans des réflexions illimitées sur les arts." (7) Valéry focuses on elements of music that help him to

explore the artistic process in general. He believes that action is at the basis of all art - "tous les arts sont des formes très variées de l'action et s'analysent en termes d'action," (8) and that the temporal nature of music simulates man's basic desire for action or movement: "La libre mobilité paraît à l'homme une condition suprême de bonheur; il la poursuit de toute son industrie, il la simule par la danse et la musique." (9) Rhythm, he argues, is not only an essential characteristic of music; rather, all arts -- including painting and sculpture -- have a rhythmic basis.

C'est-à-dire avec un rythme; vous pouvez alors concevoir la réalisation d'une oeuvre d'art, une oeuvre de peinture et de sculpture, comme une oeuvre d'art elle-même, dont l'objet matériel qui se façonne sous les doigts de l'artiste n'est plus que le prétexte, l'accessoire de scène, le sujet du ballet. (10)

Valéry insists that the aim of the artist is to create a finite piece of work that permits the reader, listener or viewer endless contemplation. He defines the work of art as "le résultat d'une action dont le but fini est de provoquer chez quelqu'un des développements infinis." (11) If the object of art is a painting, it must compel the viewer to look again and if it is a piece of music, a dance, or a poem, it must prompt the listener, viewer, or reader to experience it repeatedly. For Valéry, then, the essence of art is to create time:

Tous les arts ont été créés pour perpétuer, changer,

chacun selon son essence, un moment d'éphémère  
 délice en la certitude d'une infinité d'instant  
 délicieux. Une oeuvre n'est que l'instrument de  
 cette multiplication ou régénération possible. (12)

As a poet, Valéry aims to create this regenerative process in his poems, and he often remarks how difficult it is for the poet to hew a poem out of the same language we use to express our most pedestrian needs. Because we use language in our everyday commerce, the poet must purify a language of his own; he must create a poetic language out of the material of practical language. Of all artistic materials, Valéry insists, language is the most uncertain, for not only must the poet work against its practical aspect, but he must also create an order for himself out of a fundamentally changing and disordered system. Language, Valéry writes, is made up of "un mélange d'excitations sensorielles et psychiques parfaitement incohérentes." (13) Valéry explains that language, unlike musical sound which appeals directly to the ear, appeals to a listener for both sound and meaning, and both the musicality and logic of language are highly variable.

In Valéry's comparisons between music and poetry, music comes to represent the clarity of system that Valéry believes is lacking in language and that he aims for in his own poetry. Because poetry is, according to Valéry, "un art bien plus complexe et plus incertain que l'art des sons purs," he uses the art of "sons purs" or music to help him articulate the complex issues of his own art. (14)

With the difficulty of the poet's task in mind, Valéry looks enviously to music and musicians. In contrast to the poet who must reconstruct a poetic language out of ordinary language, the musician begins his work with "une collection donnée déjà pure qui est le son." (15) Unlike the poet, who must both redefine each word he uses and establish the relationship between those words, the musician is equipped with both pure sound and clearly defined relationships between sounds. Such is the system with which the composer/musician begins his task:

Nous vivons par l'ouïe dans l'univers des bruits.  
De leur ensemble se détache l'ensemble de bruits  
particulièrement simples, c'est-à-dire bien  
reconnaissables par l'oreille et qui lui servent de  
repères: ce sont des éléments dont les éléments  
réciproques sont intuitives, ces relations exactes  
et remarquables sont perçues par nous aussi  
nettement que leurs éléments eux-mêmes. (16)

Unlike the poet's necessary struggle against the referential nature of language, the musician's work is facilitated by the self-enclosed system of sound. Valéry distinguishes between the effect of an isolated noise and that of a musical sound: "Tandis qu'un bruit se borne à évoquer en nous un événement quelconque, un son qui se produit évoque à soi seul tout l'univers musical." (17) Because a musical note or phrase does not refer to the world outside the piece, the listener is progressively drawn further into the world created by the work of art. He perceives the distinction

between the random noise and the sound that summons the musical universe, and can then become part of the work of art that engenders infinite contemplation. Valéry emphasizes the totality of the musical universe:

il n'y a jamais confusion possible de l'effet de l'oeuvre avec les apparences d'une vie étrangère; mais bien communion possible avec les ressorts profonds de toute vie." (18)

More striking than the distinctions between poetry and music are the fundamental similarities between the two arts. Although the poet works with the more faulty instrument of language, Valéry maintains that he, too, must create the sense of a universe distinct from the practical universe. Valéry describes this universe as

un monde, ou système complet de rapports, dans lequel les êtres, les choses, les événements et les actes, s'ils ressemblent, chacun à chacun, à ceux qui peuplent et composent le monde sensible, le monde immédiat duquel ils sont empruntés, sont, d'autre part, dans une relation indéfinissable, mais merveilleusement juste, avec les modes et les lois de notre sensibilité générale. (19)

The musicalized world that the poet creates is similar to the actual musical universe for it is, in theory, a self-enclosed, ordered system. Distinct from the practical world, it rests in "une relation indéfinissable" with it.

Both music and poetry, Valéry writes, appeal to the same sense in their readers and listeners. Music clearly appeals to our sense of sound; it invites us through "l'ouïe, qui est le sens par

excellence de l'attente et de l'attention." (20) The poet's function, like the musician's, is to create a sense of "attente" in his or her readers. Referring to the poet, Valéry uses language reminiscent of the language he uses to describe musicians - "Son oreille lui parle... Nous attendons le mot inattendu - et qui ne peut être prévu, mais attendu." (21) Poet and musician/composer alike seek to create a sense of expectation in their readers and listeners, one by means of words and the other by means of pure sound.

Crucial to an understanding of Valéry's poetics is his belief that poetry is largely an auditory art. In order to create the "sensation d'univers," Valéry argues, the poet must exploit all the sound values of words as well as the infinite ambiguities in their meanings. The value of a poem, he writes, "réside dans l'indissolubilité du son et du sens." (22) In the poem there is "une certaine union très intime de la réalité physique du son et des excitations virtuelles du sens.." (23) The physical or auditory elements of words are bound to the ambiguities in their meanings.

Much of Valéry's prose is devoted to sharpening this conception of poetry. A sampling of these definitions indicates the degree to which Valéry considers sound at the very basis of the poem:

- Poetry is "l'art d'abuser de la résonance des mots." (24)

- "Un poème est un discours qui exige et qui

entraîne une liaison continuée entre la voix qui est et la voix qui vient et qui doit venir." (25)

- "Mais la Poésie n'est pas la pensée, elle est la divinisation de la voix." (26)

For Valéry, the resonance of words and the development of the poetic voice are preeminent in poetry. When Valéry discusses the effect of a poem, he frequently uses the term "resonance."

"Resonance" recalls, for Valéry, the process of the poem itself.

Because of the particular way the words sound, they induce the reader to listen to them again, to re-experience the poem.

Sound in poetry, Valéry maintains, is not the pure sound we are familiar with in music; the sound that contributes to poetic resonance is created by the poetic voice. In the second definition above, Valéry, with the repetition of "v" sounds, rather musically makes his point that the voice creates in the reader the compulsion to reread and to listen repeatedly to the poem. The poetic voice draws the reader into the poem, sustains the poetic movement, and creates poetic meaning. Valéry emphasizes the centrality of the voice in the creation of the poetic state when he writes: "Ôtez la voix et la voix qu'il faut, tout devient arbitraire." (27)

While Valéry often writes that poetry is born of the balance between sound and meaning, he stresses that sound and form are its very essence. Unlike discursive language that we use in order to grasp meaning or a thought, poetic language, Valéry contends, is the

"divinisation" of the voice. So sacred are the voice and the poetic tone that, Valéry believes, a true poet will abandon a thought rather than sacrifice the quality of poetic sound:

S'il est un vrai poète, il sacrifiera presque toujours à la forme...cette pensée qui ne peut se fondre en poème si elle exige pour s'exprimer qu'on use de mots ou de tours étrangers au ton poétique. Une alliance intime du son et du sens, qui est la caractéristique essentielle en poésie, ne peut s'obtenir qu'aux dépens de quelque chose, - qui n'est autre que la pensée. (28)

In an anecdote about Degas and Mallarmé that he cites several times in his essays, Valéry underlines his contention that thought alone does not create poetry. Degas, fretting about his difficulties with a poem he is writing, exclaims to Mallarmé that he (Degas) does not understand his great problems with his poem, for he is full of ideas. Mallarmé answers, and Valéry sees in his response an important lesson: "Mais Degas, ce n'est pas avec des idées qu'on fait des vers, c'est avec des mots." (29)

The words to which Mallarmé refers take on a physical aspect in poetry. Valéry extends Mallarmé's thought, then, when he explains that the words of poetry, rather than leading the reader to a fixed meaning, function as barriers to immediate meaning; their sounds and ambiguities provoke the reader to repeat the words and to hear the poem once again. He describes the dawning of the poetic state in an anecdote in which someone asks him for a match in a certain tone and with a distinctive turn of phrase. Such is the effect of the sounds

of the words:

Chose étrange: le son, et comme la figure de votre petite phrase, revient en moi, se répète en moi, comme si elle se plaisait en moi; et moi, j'aime à m'entendre la redire, cette petite phrase qui a presque perdu son sens, qui a cessé de servir, et qui pourtant veut vivre encore, mais d'une tout autre vie. Elle a pris une valeur; et elle l'a prise au dépens de la signification finie. Elle a créé le besoin d'être encore entendue... (30)

Valéry emphasizes the auditory elements at the very basis of poetry in the above passage. The sound or shape of the sentence that he hears causes him to repeat the words to himself. These sounds, in turn, create a pleasure for him ("elle se plaisait", "j'aime à m'entendre"); unlike the language of ordinary discourse, they cease to point to any definite meaning ("cette petite phrase a presque perdu son sens"). As the words begin to create a pleasure in themselves, they also indicate to Valéry the poetic world distinct from the ordinary world (the sentence "veut vivre encore...d'une tout autre vie"). The sentence that engenders the poetic universe then takes on a value of its own. Valéry here, once again, points out that this value is at the expense of meaning or thought ("au dépens de la signification finie"). What began as an ambiguous sound, ultimately creates a need of its own to be heard ("le besoin d'être encore entendue").

Valéry's emphasis on the auditory basis of the poem does not mean that the poem is wholly musical, or that, as readers, we should

not search for its meaning. He believes, however, that even our search for poetic meaning is essentially an auditory process. To understand poems such as Mallarmé's "Brise Marine" and "Les Fenêtres," he finds himself obliged to repeat the words to himself.

(31) Rather than being able to uncover the meaning of the poems by straightforwardly reading from beginning to end, Valéry insists that the words, in and of themselves, take on a physical aspect and that the ambiguities that result defy immediate comprehension. Such ambiguities then prompt the reader to listen to the poem once again in order to achieve understanding.

Valéry probes this quality of Mallarmé's poems maintaining that they impose themselves on his memory rather than dissolving into a fixed meaning: "J'observais que ces mêmes vers tres obscurs avaient en eux je ne sais quelle nécessité qui les imposait à ma memoire."

(32) Because the words of the poems do not lead the reader to a clear meaning as the words of ordinary discourse do, and they create a need in the reader to hear them repeatedly, the words "impose themselves" on his memory. The auditory quality of repetition subtly guides Valéry to the meaning in Mallarmé's poems:

...en me répétant involontairement ces vers si  
difficiles à comprendre, je constatais que les  
énigmes s'atténaient, la compréhension se  
dessinait. Le poète se justifiait. La répétition  
faisait tendre mon esprit vers un limite, vers un  
sens parfaitement défini. (33)

Valéry elaborates on his idea of approaching meaning in poems through their auditory qualities when he advises readers of Racine, who, Valéry insists, achieves musical poetry in his plays. Here again, he asserts that the reader ought not to rush into poetry searching for meaning:

Approchez-vous de lui sans force, et comme insensiblement. N'arrivez à la tendresse, à la violence, que dans la musique et par elle. Défendez-vous longtemps de souligner des mots; il n'y a pas encore des mots, il n'y a que des syllabes et des rythmes. Demeurez dans ce pur état musical jusqu'au moment que le sens survenu peu à peu ne pourra plus nuire à la forme de la musique. Vous l'introduirez à la fin comme la suprême nuance qui transfigurera sans l'altérer votre morceau. (34)

Valéry believes that meaning is best found when the reader no longer sees words as signs of meaning, but as sounds ("syllabes et des rythmes") He asks that the reader stay in "ce pur état musical," so that meaning is found where it ought to be found in poetry -- inseparable from "la forme de la musique." Meaning, he insists, will emerge from the reader's close attention to Racine's poetic music.

In his words to readers of Racine, and throughout his writings, Valéry characteristically suggests attention to form ("la forme de la musique"): "rimes, l'inversion, les figures développées, les symétries et les images," all that poetic convention comprises. (35) The form of poetry, Valéry insists, is what draws us away from ordinary discourse and introduces us into the poetic realm. In "De

la diction des vers," Valéry cautions, however, that paying close attention to form and poetic convention does not alone guide us to understanding. Rather, he argues, "une création musicale ne se réduit pas à une observance," and then points out how we may discover Racine's musicality. In addition to respecting the formal structure of the poetry, he urges the reader to:

...éprouvez à loisir, écoutez jusqu'aux harmoniques  
les timbres de Racine, les nuances, les reflets  
réciproques de ses voyelles, les actes nets et purs,  
les liens souples de ses consonnes et de leurs  
ajustements. (36)

Valéry insists, in essay after essay, that the formal structure of the poem together with its musical detail sustain poetry. He maintains that, in direct contrast to practical language or prose where meaning is the object, in poetry "C'est bien le non-usage, le non-dire 'qu'il pleut' qui est son affaire." (37) The only approach to thought in poetry, Valéry emphasizes, is through its form. So crucial is poetic form that it is impossible to paraphrase a poem, which, he asserts, has no literal meaning; its meaning ("fond" or "sens") is inseparable from its form ("son" or "forme").

The various formal aspects of the poem, according to Valéry, urge the reader to sever himself from the patterns of ordinary speech and force him to transform his voice. He insists that we can recognize poetry when, in reading, we can no longer adhere to our ordinary speaking voices:

Il faut et il suffit, pour qu'il y ait poésie  
certaine... que le simple ajustement des mots, que  
nous allions lisant comme l'on parle, oblige notre  
voix, même intérieure, à se dégager du ton et de  
l'allure du discours ordinaire, et la place dans un  
tout autre mode et comme dans un tout autre temps. (38)

Valéry finds in Mallarmé's poems such close attention to form that  
in reading he must change his speaking voice to a singing voice - he  
is "forcé de porter la voix au chant." (39) According to Valéry,  
the need for this vocal transformation unambiguously establishes the  
presence of true poetry: "le vers de Mallarmé, tel que je lisais,  
avec cette imparfaite compréhension qui l'accompagnait, m'imposait  
l'existence du vers lui-même, compris ou non." (40)

In his emphasis on poetic form as well as in his auditory  
understanding of the poem, Valéry urges a more oral role for modern  
poetry. Such a role is not a modern innovation; by focusing our  
attention on the oral aspect of poetry, Valéry asserts the bond  
between his poetic practice and the origins of the art.

...il suffit d'observer que la littérature  
primitive, celle qui n'est pas écrite, celle qui ne  
se garde et ne se transmet que par les actes de  
l'être vivant, par un système d'échange entre la  
voix articulée, l'ouïe et la mémoire, est une  
littérature nécessairement rythmée, parfois rimée,  
et pourvue de tous les moyens que peut offrir la  
parole pour créer le souvenir d'elle-même, se faire  
retenir, s'imprimer dans l'esprit. Tout ce qui  
paraît précieux à conserver est mis en forme de  
poème, dans les époques qui ne savent pas encore  
créer des signes matériels. (41)

Valéry stresses the active process and the tightly constructed form

of ancient oral poetry. In order that the bard could remember it, the poem was created with sure rhythms, rhyme and definite forms. Poetry was assured survival through the ongoing "système d'échange" of voice, hearing, and memory.

In his use of a similar vocabulary to describe both ancient and modern poetry, and in the way he associates the ancient oral process of composition with the composition of modern poetry, Valéry recreates an oral dimension in modern poetry based, in part, on his understanding of the origins of poetry. Ancient oral poetry, he states, is transmitted by the "actes de l'être vivant," and is preserved through the active "système d'échange." Valéry likewise asserts, in his discussions of the modern artistic (and, by extension, poetic) process that, as readers, we would better understand the essence of poetry, if we were trained "à considérer avec plus de complaisance, et même avec plus de passion, l'action qui fait, que la chose faite. (42) Valéry's definition of the poem, in "Poésie et pensée abstraite," as "l'échange harmonique entre l'impression et l'expression," or between "son et sens," is also reminiscent of the ancient system based on "un système d'échange entre la voix articulée, l'ouïe, et la mémoire." (43) Such an exchange between sound and meaning in the modern poem recalls the ancient oral system based on the relationship between voice and meaning. His firm commitment to the form of modern poetry also

recalls the tight structure needed to ensure the transmission of poetry in the world before writing.

Valéry's discussions of the oral foundations and of the auditory basis of poetry are not restricted to abstractions about the poetic process; ideas about reciting poetry often accompany his theories. In his essay "De la diction des vers," Valéry addresses the issue of how we may recite poetry. He asserts that poetic diction is a difficult problem, for each poet has his own diction and composes his work in accordance with his particular ear. Because there is not one diction for all poems, Valéry believes that each poet writes for an ideal reader. He defines his own:

Qu'il ne faut point, dans l'étude d'une pièce de poésie que l'on veut entendre, prendre pour origine ou point de départ de sa recherche, le discours ordinaire et la parole courante pour s'élever de cette prose plane jusqu'au ton poétique voulu; mais au contraire, je pensais qu'il faudrait se fonder sur le chant, se mettre dans l'état du chanteur, accommoder sa voix à la plénitude du son musical, et de la redescendre jusqu'à l'état un peu moins vibrant qui convient aux vers. Il me semblait que ce fût là le seul moyen de préserver l'essence musicale des poèmes. (44)

Valéry's ideal reader would respect the firm distinction between poetic and discursive language so that he would not take ordinary discourse as his starting point. Like Valéry's true poet who considers poetic tone before thought, his reader sees his "point de départ" as song. From the purity of musical song, he can then

find the sound "un peu moins vibrant" appropriate to poetry. Such a reader, Valéry asserts, preserves "l'essence musicale des poemes."(45)

Convinced of the musical essence of poems, Valéry wished to experiment with poetic performance, and he worked with Croiza, a French singer, so that he would have someone recite poems (in this case, poems of Ronsard) who would truly have song as her starting point. Valéry elaborates on his idea of the musicality of poetic diction in his letter to Croiza:

La poésie n'est pas la musique; elle est encore moins le discours. C'est peut-être cet ambigu qui fait sa délicatesse. On peut dire qu'elle va chanter plus qu'elle ne chante; et qu'elle va s'expliquer, plus qu'elle ne s'explique... par le rythme, les accents et les consonances, faisant ce qu'elle peut, elle essaye de communiquer une vertu quasi musicale à l'expression de certaines pensées. Non de toutes les pensées. (46)

Although poetry has a relationship to both music and discourse, Valéry favors its bond with music. While he admits its relationship to both arts, Valéry writes that poetry is "encore moins le discours." He further asserts its closer relationship to music by pointing to the various musical aspects of poetic language - "rythme, les accents et les consonances," -and by maintaining that through these various conventions, poetry expresses "une vertu quasi musicale" to certain thoughts.

The difficulty of clearly establishing the oral or musical

dimension of poetry, according to Valéry, lies in the nature of poetry itself. While Valéry believes that poetry is closer to music than to discourse, the ambiguity of his art prevents him from being more precise than asserting that it communicates "une vertu quasi musicale." In his letter to Mme. Croiza, Valéry again stresses the musical essence of poetry, yet in his explanations to the singer, his descriptions of poetic music are likewise less than exact. Although she must begin her recitation with "la plénitude du son musical," Valéry's most specific description of the sound she must "redescend" to is no surer than "l'état un peu moins vibrant qui convient aux vers." Exactly where in the register of a singer's voice this slightly less musical sound lies, is perhaps one of the most perplexing issues in Valéry's attempt to locate the "essence musicale des poèmes."

Despite the ambiguity of poetry, Valéry tries, throughout his essays and notebooks, to pinpoint its musical dimension. Although he does not address this issue in one single essay or in a clear series of essays, he intermittently refers to the musical nature of poetry throughout his writings, and a definition of poetry as a kind of music emerges from his texts.

Valéry's notion of the poem as a text like a musical composition is central to understanding of the recital or performance aspect of modern poetry. A poem may be spoken or read

in as many ways as there are readers, for the text does not specifically indicate one correct reading:

Un poème, comme un morceau de musique, n'offre en soi qu'un texte, qui n'est rigoureusement qu'une sorte de recette; le cuisinier qui l'exécute a un rôle essentiel. Parler d'un poème en soi, juger un poème en soi, cela n'a point de sens réel et précis. C'est parler d'une chose possible. Le poème est une abstraction, une écriture qui attend, une loi qui ne vit que sur quelque bouche humaine, et cette bouche est ce qu'elle est. (47)

Similar to the musical composition which is silent until brought to life by the instrumentalist, the poem offers only a "recette" until it is spoken or sung. Valéry emphasizes the oral nature of the poem in his assertion that it is meaningless to talk about a poem in and of itself; a poem is a virtuality, an expression of the possible. He stresses the importance of the poem so defined when he progressively considers the poem first as "abstraction," then "écriture," and finally as "une loi." Conceived as "abstraction" or "choses possibles" in the poet's mind, then recorded in writing "qui attend" for an interpretive voice, the poem ultimately must (as "une loi") be understood for its auditory or musical essence. Totally dependent on "quelque bouche humaine," the poem occurs in the act of its recital or performance.

Valéry also directs our attention to poetic music in his discussions of the poet's use of particular words. Of his own early poetry, he writes:

Ma première et tres courte pratique de l'art des vers m'avait accoutumé à disposer les mots, et même des 'idées' comme de moyens, qui n'ont que des valeurs instantanées, des effets de position. (48)

Valéry emphasizes the musical techniques of poetic composition by referring to the words he uses as if they were notes. Just as a composer tries various notes or sounds of particular instruments to achieve a desired effect, so Valéry employs words "comme des moyens" for their immediate value ("des valeurs instantanées"). Rather than using words to express a clear meaning, Valéry manipulates words for "des effets de position" in the text.

Just as we associate particular emotions with certain musical instruments, Valéry maintains that, as readers of poetry we can identify poetic emotions by examining the way poets use particular words:

Le seul timbre du violoncelle exerce chez bien des personnes une véritable domination viscérale. Il y a des mots dont la fréquence, chez un auteur, nous révèle qu'ils sont en lui tout autrement doués de résonance, et, par conséquent, de puissance positivement créatrice qu'ils ne le sont en général. (49)

Designated words in the poem operate similarly to the way instruments do in a musical piece, evoking strong emotions on the part of the listener. Valéry believes that the frequency with which poets use these key words indicates to the reader their importance in the poem. He emphasizes our hearing these words in his use of the term "resonance." Because the reader's attention is

consistently drawn to the key words in a poet's work, they resound in his mind; the word, like the sound of the cello then may provoke "une véritable domination viscérale."

The resonance that Valéry attributes to specific words in a poem distinguishes them from their discursive origin. In the "Philosophie" section of his notebooks, Valéry elaborates on this different class of words:

Ce qu'il y a d'excitant dans les idées n'est pas idées - c'est ce qui n'est pas...pensé, ce qui est naissant et non né, qui excite.

Il faut donc des mots avec lesquels on n'en puisse jamais finir - qui ne sont jamais identiquement annulés par une représentation quelconque, - des mots-musique. (50)

While Valéry is not specifically referring to poetic language here, he is discussing the same compositional process in terms of philosophy that he does in his writings on poetics. Just as the poetically resonant or key words take on a "puissance positivement créatrice," "mots-musique" assume an aspect with which "on n'en puisse jamais finir." These poetic and philosophic words do more than express a state of being, for we do not substitute particular meanings or images for them. Unlike the words in discursive language which are less significant than the meanings which they convey, "mots-musique" or poetic words assume an importance in themselves. Their sounds and ambiguities do not merely express what

already is, but rather, the pursuit of knowledge or understanding ("ce qui est naissant et non ne").

Valéry again discusses the musical power that words can have beyond their discursive meaning in his essay "Je disais quelquefois à Stéphane Mallarmé." We can be more certain that he is treating the same aspect of language in his discussion of philosophic and poetic language with a closer look at his description of the power of poetic words:

Ce qui se chante ou s'articule aux instants les plus solennels ou les plus critiques de la vie; ce qui sonne dans les liturgies; ce qui se murmure ou se gémit dans les extrêmes de la passion; ce qui calme un enfant ou un misérable; ce qui atteste la vérité dans un serment, ce sont paroles qui ne se peuvent résoudre en idées claires, ni separer, sans les rendre absurde ou vaines, d'un certain ton et d'un certain mode. Dans toutes ces occasions, l'accent et l'allure de la voix l'emportent sur ce qu'elle éveille d'intelligible: ils s'adressent à notre vie plus qu'à notre esprit. - Je veux dire que ces paroles nous intiment de devenir, bien plus qu'elles ne nous excitent à comprendre. (51)

The power of poetic language lies in its ability to move us beyond its intellectual connotations. Like "mots-musique," poetic words do not resolve into "idées claires"; their power is born of their resonance. They must be understood through "l'accent et l'allure de la voix," spoken in "un certain ton et d'un certain mode." These words, like "mots-musique," unfold an ongoing process ("ces paroles nous intiment de devenir") more than they express what we already know, or what we can rationally understand.

As readers or performers of poetic texts, Valéry believes that we would be able to more accurately express the diction of a poem if poets adopted elements of musical punctuation. In his notebooks, Valéry points to critics of his own poetry who take him to task for his poetic punctuation ("des mots soulignés, des tirets, des guillemets"), and he asserts that his use of punctuation exhibits the inadequacy of our poetic punctuation. (52) Poetry, he insists, should employ signs that indicate tone:

Rien n'indique à la lecture qu'il faille (par exemple) reprendre un certain ton du commencement de la phrase, après en avoir pris un autre pendant q[ue]lq[ues] mots (interpolant une remarque -).-  
Pourquoi pas des signes comme en musique? (53)

Such tonal punctuation would enable the reader to understand the poem as a whole constructed of varying parts. Valéry suggests that musical punctuation would foster a greater appreciation of the intrinsically vocal nature of poetry. "Signes de vitesse, de fortement articulé - des arrêts de différente durée. Des 'vivace,' 'solenne,' 'staccato,' 'scherzando,' " would all contribute to a more precise rendering of the poetic voice. (54)

Valéry suggests that if poets adopted aspects of musical form in their poems, they could remain truer to the nature poetry. In his essay "Au sujet du Cimetière marin," Valéry relates his uneasiness with the critical tendency to view his poems as finished products. For Valéry, a work is never "achevé, - mot qui...n'a aucun sens, -

mais abandonné." (55) If poets employed the musical convention of variations, they could better express the essentially infinite poetic process:

...je serais tenté...d'engager les poètes à produire,  
à la mode des musiciens, une diversité de  
variantes ou de solutions du même sujet. Rien ne me  
semblerait plus conforme à l'idée que j'aime à me  
faire d'un poète et de la poésie. (56)

Although Valéry does not explicitly state that his idea of poetic variations would contribute to musical poetry per se, he does assert that such a transposition of musical form to poetry is in keeping with his most fundamental ideas concerning both poets and poetry.

Valéry's definitions of the musicality of poetry and his suggestions for poetic adoption of musical forms express his concern with re-establishing the oral tradition of poetry. As important as this concern is in its own right, Valéry, however, has a more crucial reason for focusing on poetry's musical nature. His ideas about music and the auditory aspect of poetry reflect his most pressing philosophic questions. Throughout his diverse writings, Valéry continually discusses the ever-changing nature of human life: the life of the mind and of the external world. Whether he speaks about Leonardo, Descartes, the state of the modern world, or poetics, Valéry returns, with the regularity of a musical refrain, to the central problem of how an artist or thinker might create a

coherent vision of the universe without succumbing to the instability and chaos characteristic of both mind and world. Valéry searches, in his essays and notebooks, for a way of thinking or a system that can help him to resist this flux, and he finds in music such an art form. For Valéry, reflecting about music allows him to more fully resist the flux of his own mind and of the world, and ultimately enables him to be able to theorize about (and write) a poetry that can offer a modern reader a place for contemplation in an increasingly unstable world.

While Valéry does not, in one distinct period of his life or in a particular essay sequence, define or examine the problem of the flux organically, he touches on aspects of it in many essays and in his notebooks. A common thread woven through many of Valéry's literary and philosophical essays is the question of how the thinkers and poets he so admires were able to create their work given the ever-shifting character of the mind. In his Leonardo essays, for example, while Valéry touches on Leonardo's achievements as painter and inventor, his focus is on Leonardo's process of mind. According to Valéry, Leonardo was able to work in diverse scientific fields as well as in painting, because of the agility of his mind and his openness to the movement of his surrounding universe. As he concentrates on Leonardo's extraordinary creative achievements, Valéry describes the flux:

Qu'est-ce qui résiste à l'entrain des sens, à la dissipation des idées, à l'affaiblissement des souvenirs, à la variation lente de l'organisme, à l'action incessante et multiforme de l'univers?- Ce n'est que cette conscience seule, à l'état le plus abstrait. (57)

In order for Leonardo, or any artist, to accomplish his work, he must resist the constant movement characteristic of the mind.

"Variation lente" is, according to Valéry, intrinsic to the human organism. Our hearing, vision, touch, as well as our other senses, continually alter our perceptions, and the mind itself cannot sustain ideas indefinitely. And not only must the artist and thinker contend with the mobility of their own minds, but they must also try to work in the face of the constantly changing world external to themselves, "à l'action incessante et multiforme de l'univers."

In Valéry's essays on Descartes, he again focuses more on the workings of Descartes' mind than on particular philosophical works. In "Une vue de Descartes," as he discusses Descartes' ambition of systematizing knowledge, Valéry points to the instability of the mind:

Il a pleine confiance dans son armement de modèles et d'idéaux mathématiques, et il peut à présent sans retour vers aucun passé, sans égard à aucune tradition, s'engager dans la lutte qui sera celle de sa volonté de clarté et d'organisation de la connaissance contre l'incertain, l'accidentel, le confus et l'inconséquent qui sont les attributs les plus probables de la plupart de nos pensées. (58)

Valéry sees Descartes' aim to systematize knowledge similarly to the

way in which he views Leonardo's accomplishments. Just as Leonardo must resist the mind's constant movement in order to create his work, so must Descartes struggle against the uncertain and random nature of our thoughts in order to systematize those which are most significant.

Does the world exterior to the mind offer refuge from "la mobilité essentielle de l'esprit? (59) Valéry studies this problem in his notebooks, and maintains that reality reflects the diversity and mobility of the mind. In his notebooks, he works at successive definitions of reality:

-Le réel est l'indépendance que conserve une chose au regard de la connaissance que j'en ai; la chose est capable de propriétés et de variations dont aucune connaissance aussi complète, aussi serrée que possible ne peut - Aucune connaissance de telle chose ne peut s'y substituer entièrement. (60)

-La 'réalité' - ce qui est capable d'une infinité de rôles, d'interprétations, de points de vue. (61)

-Le réel est ce qui peut figurer dans une infinité de points de vue, de combinaisons, d'actions, et qui est en somme une infinité potentielle. (62)

-Chaque 'chose' est en réalité 'plusieurs choses', à la fois. Cette pierre est une arme. Ce rire est un bruit. Cette couleur est signe de gain. La main humaine multiforme. (63)

Far from offering relief from the mobility and confusion of our minds, reality contributes to our inability to contain our perceptions of the objects surrounding us. Valéry maintains that

reality is precisely what we cannot circumscribe; each object encompasses a potential for change ("la chose est capable de propriétés et de variations") that exceeds our ability to fix our perception of it: "Le réel est l'indépendance que conserve une chose au regard que j'en ai."

Although objects in reality exist apart from ourselves, Valéry asserts that our conception of these objects is bound by our own perceptions. Reality, then, can only reflect the variations characteristic of our minds: it "est capable d'une infinité de rôles, d'interprétations, de points de vue," and "de combinaisons, d'actions." Each of us, in turn, may perceive the same object or occurrence differently and each of these perceptions makes up the reality of these objects or occurrences. Reality thus encompasses the composite of all our possible perceptions: "Le réel est en somme une infinité potentielle."

Valéry does not directly state that reality is ever-moving in itself, yet he suggests the mobile and changeable aspect of the universe in all the above definitions, stressing the infinite possibility of reality in each one. In the first, reality is "l'indépendance que conserve une chose;" in the second reality "est capable d'une infinité de rôles...;" in the third, reality "est ce qui peut figurer dans une infinité de points de vue etc." If, as all these definitions suggest, reality can manifest itself in any

form, then its essential characteristic is its transformative nature. That Valéry believes this is true is clear from the final definition above, for "chaque chose est en réalité plusieurs choses." In Valéry's assertion that each thing encompasses such a potential for change lies his belief in the active and ever-changing nature of the world.

Although Valéry believes that the mind and world are intrinsically ever-moving, his concentration on this aspect of life is, to a large degree, informed by his experience and understanding of the modern world. In many areas of his work, Valéry often mentions his disturbance at the disordered state of his contemporary world. In "La France travaille" (1932), referring to the immense changes in industrial technology and in the realm of political life, Valéry insists that from the end of the nineteenth century to the time the essay was written "Jamais transformation plus profonde et plus brusque ne s'est prononcée dans l'histoire." (64) He believes that technological advancements in communications, in particular, have so altered an enduring world view that it has become increasingly difficult to reflect upon or comprehend ourselves. In his essay "Notre destin et les lettres," Valéry characterizes his time:

...nous nous sommes de plus en plus éloignés des conditions primitives de toute vie, entraînés que nous sommes, avec une rapidité qui s'accélère jusqu'à devenir inquiétante, dans un état de choses

dont la complexité, l'instabilité, le désordre caractéristique nous égarent, nous interdisent la moindre prévision, nous ôtent toute possibilité de raisonner sur l'avenir, de préciser les enseignements qu'on avait jadis coutume de demander au passé, et absorbent dans leur emportement et leur fluctuation tout effort de fixation et de construction, qu'elle soit intellectuelle ou sociale, comme un sable mouvant absorbe les forces de l'animal qui s'aventure sur lui. (65)

The enormous technological advances and industrialization have occurred in such a relatively short period of time that Valéry believes that they have displaced our previous notions of human life. Valéry emphasizes our loss of control in his assertion that these rapid changes have unleashed a "complexité, instabilité," and a "désordre" that have left us virtually powerless. In his description of the chaos marking his time, with each successive verb Valéry intensifies our loss of control. The disorder first draws us away ("nous égarent"), then forbids or prevents our having any foresight ("nous interdisent la moindre prévision"), and finally deprives us of any real sense of the future ("nous ôtent toute possibilité de raisonner sur l'avenir"). These changes provoke a struggle between past and future, for we can no longer rely on our knowledge of the past for guidance toward the future ("nous ôtent... de préciser les enseignements qu'on avait jadis coutume de demander au passé"). Valéry emphasizes the intensity of this struggle later in the same essay when he writes:

Voilà donc que l'homme mobile s'oppose à l'homme

enraciné. Nous assistons à une lutte désespérée  
entre l'antique structure et le pouvoir croissant de  
déplacement. (66)

The disorder of the modern world not only obscures our vision  
of a future; it literally absorbs us into its accelerating pace.

And most importantly for Valéry, who is ultimately concerned with  
our ability to create art, so all-consuming are the nature and speed  
of these changes that they prevent "tout effort de fixation et  
construction, qu'elle soit intellectuelle ou sociale." Valéry  
underscores our total powerlessness in his closing image equating  
our absorption into the disorder with the absorption of an animal  
into quicksand ("comme un sable mouvant absorbe les forces de  
l'animal qui s'aventure sur lui.")

Because we are increasingly unable to resist the rapidly  
advancing chaos with our efforts at "fixation et construction,"  
Valéry insists that we have begun to pay a high price for modern  
technology. In "Introduction à un dialogue sur l'art," he maintains  
that our progress has cost us our contemplative lives:

Notre progrès se paye, et nous pouvons mesurer ce  
qu'il nous coûte, en loisirs délicats, en jouissances  
approfondies, en compréhension sincère,  
intime et contemplative des ouvrages de l'art. (67)

Valéry further argues that in addition to these losses, we have also  
begun to create art that merely reflects the encroaching disorder:

...tout nous paraît si précaire, si instable en  
toutes choses, si nécessairement accidentel, que  
nous en sommes venus à faire des accidents de la

sensation et de la conscience la moins soutenue, la substance de bien des ouvrages. (68)

Upset by what he sees as an advancing chaos, Valéry becomes concerned with how he might "transformer le désordre en ordre" through thought and art. (69) Much of his thinking about art reflects his concern about such a transformation. Writing about architecture, one of the arts he most admires, he refers to the construction of a building as "le passage du désordre à l'ordre." (70) In his references to the world of music, Valéry devotes much attention to the system of sound that transforms the random noise of the world into an ordered musical universe. And, in his poetics, Valéry aims to create a poetic language, clearly distinguishable from the disordered language of ordinary discourse. Of his ambition to forge such a poetic language, Valéry writes "Tout me devint question d'un nouvel ordre." (71)

For an artist to be able to represent or express the life of the mind and world, however, he must order the flux with a system that neither succumbs to it, nor totally fixes it. In essays and notebooks alike, Valéry expresses suspicion of intellectual and artistic systems that wholly fix the movement of the universe. Should the work of art attempt to fix the movement of mind and world, it would engender a false notion of reality. In his essay "Études et fragments sur le rêve," Valéry examines the reality of objects in dream states and maintains that what is fixed creates

falsity:

Le réel est ce dont on ne peut s'éveiller, ce dont nul mouvement ne me tire, mais que tout mouvement renforce, reproduit, régénère. Le non-réel, au contraire, naît à proportion de l'immobilisation partielle ...le fixe engendre le faux. (72)

To create a work of art, then, the artist must arrest the flux momentarily. However, he must do so in a form that is regenerative, one that creates the impulse to repeat the process (of appreciating or understanding the work) indefinitely. Referring to his own poetic process, Valéry explains his ambivalent feelings about fixity and form:

Ce que j'ai fait me paraît toujours provisoire, étape, à reprendre. Ce n'est achevé que par accident. Publier oeuvre O est un accident qui arrive à O. J'ai la sensation de quelque bêtise devant tout ce qui est fixé. Quelle que soit la valeur, il me semble impossible que cette fixation puisse résister au travail incessant du reste des choses. D'où exigence de la forme. (73)

Valéry sees the final product of his work as arbitrary, and insists that "cette fixation" can never resolve into one form the never-ending process of the work itself. Despite his belief that all products of the mind are inconclusive or infinite, the poem (or musical piece, dance composition, etc.) does appear as a printed, conclusive product. The solution Valéry has to this dilemma lies in the nature of the art form. At the same time as his poem appears completed, its form must compel the reader (listener or viewer) to

constantly re-experience it. At once, then, the work of art appears to fix the movement of the mind and world (without actually fixing it), and reflects or represents ("renforce, reproduit, régénère") the flux. Valéry describes this process in the regenerative forms of music, dance, poetry and painting in the following passage (Note that he refers to music and dance first!):

Si j'écris une musique ou une danse, je fixe une certaine action qui sera reproduite à volonté. Si j'écris un poème, une musique, si je fais un tableau, je tends à fixer, à décharger mon émotion, à faire une chose durable, et indéfiniment capable si elle est mise en action, de vous faire entendre le poème, entendre la musique, retrouver le tableau.  
(74)

Valéry chooses the verb "fixer" to describe the temporary cessation of movement; however, he maintains that the artistic process does not exactly fix the flux. Rather, the artist fixes "une certaine action" only so that "une chose durable," the art object or process, is once again "mise en action," this time in order for us to be able to experience the work of art indefinitely.

Drawn to abstract thought throughout his life (the number of pages devoted to philosophy in essays and notebooks far exceeds those devoted to other disciplines), Valéry often turns to philosophy to clarify his aesthetic aims. However, he finds that philosophers are handicapped by their dependence on discursive language which is, by nature, imprecise: "Tout langage naît dans l'à peu près et y plonge des racines." (75) Valéry asserts that the

imprecision of discursive language is due to its transitive nature. Because the value of each word lies solely in the context in which it is spoken -- "Le mot x ne contient pas plus de richesse que celui qui le dit ou que celui qui l'écoute et dans l'instant même n'en possède," -- discursive language can only suffice for our most immediate exchanges. (76) A philosopher can hardly build an enduring system upon such changeable meanings of words. Valéry consequently concludes that "toute la philosophie est née d'illusions sur le savoir qui sont illusions sur le langage." (77)

As poet and abstract thinker, Valéry, too, relies on language and he sees himself confronted by similar obstacles as the philosopher. For how can he hope to create a work of art or a coherent poetic theory that transcends the disorder of the world given the "nature provisoire du langage?" (78) Frustrated in his aim to construct "les pures combinaisons de relations" and the "transformations incessantes" of both mind and world in language, Valéry naturally turns to music which he considers the paradigm of non-representational art forms. (79) He finds in music's self-enclosed, non-referential system, its rigorous and open-ended forms, its natural mobility, the language (or art form) most suited to express what he longs to express in poetry: the universal flux in a finite but regenerative form. A closer look at some of the main features of Valéry's theory reveals the great extent to which

he relies on his understanding of music to shape his ideas about poetry.

So strong is Valéry's belief in the expressive potential of music's system that despite the representational nature of language, he develops a poetic theory that encourages the poet to create a linguistic system similar to the musical system he admires. Throughout his essays, Valéry asserts that for the poet to create a world distinct from the chaos of daily life, he must carve out of language a language of his own, one as separate from discursive language as the language of any other non-representational system. In his essay "Les droits du poète sur la langue," as he explains his own reasons for taking liberties with established linguistic patterns in "La Jeune Parque," Valéry argues that the poet who alters discursive language contributes to the development of a distinct poetic system:

On pourrait concevoir que le langage pratique se développât au point de constituer un système de notations aussi différent du langage pratique que sont la langue artificielle de l'algèbre ou celle de la chimie. (80)

Valéry discusses his own program to systematize a poetic language throughout his notebooks, repeatedly asserting the necessity of a "rupture méthodique des associations et des formes toutes faites du langage." (81) That he has music's self-enclosed system in mind as a model is clear from several entries, two of

which will be discussed here:

1. Constituer le monde et l'homme comme la musique a été constituée à partir des bruits - Séparer les corps purs, les vibrations périodiques - Former les éléments reconnaissables et reproductibles - Passer à leur combinaisons. (82)

2. ... Épurer - redessiner, resignifier les choses, redissoudre et faire recristalliser les relations - Préparer des corps purs - Gamme. (83)

Valéry uses his understanding of music's system as the basis of his program to create a poetic universe of "le monde et l'homme," referring to language as though it were sound. Just as sound is born of "des bruits," so is Valéry's poetic language. More attentive to the "vibrations periodiques" of words than he is to their meanings, Valéry stresses the physical properties of poetic language.

Once he has reconstructed language by exploring the individual sounds of words and their combinations, the poet readies himself to work with a "purified" system. In both passages Valéry suggests the association between his poetic theory and music by referring to words as "corps purs." Disassociated from their usual connotations and re-established in a new system of relations, they will function more like musical notes than the words of everyday discourse. By calling his new system "Gamme," Valéry once again calls attention to the musical origin of his poetic theory. The words of his system are no longer disparate; each word occupies a precise position in relation to every other word, much as the notes do in a musical

scale.

As we noted earlier, music invites the listener to participate in its ever-renewed movement. It is precisely this renewed movement that Valéry aspires to in poetry. While we cannot say definitively that it is this understanding of music's mobility that gives birth to Valéry's central idea of the regenerative nature of poetic form, his emulation of music's mobility is certainly present in his descriptions of the form of poetry. In "Poésie et pensée abstraite," for example, after he has elucidated the difficulty of the poet's task by comparing it to the musician's, he discusses the poet's objective of creating a state rather than a finite or fixed product. Valéry's description of the poetic state is so close to his descriptions of the state created by music, that he must certainly have had music in mind as a model:

Il s'agit donc, non point d'effectuer une opération finie, et dont la fin est située quelque part dans le milieu qui nous entoure; mais bien de créer et d'entretenir en l'exaltant, un certain état, par un mouvement périodique qui peut s'exécuter sur place; mouvement qui se désintéresse presque entièrement de la vue, mais qui s'excite et se règle par les rythmes auditifs. (84)

Valéry suggests the musical origin of his theory in his use of terms such as "mouvements périodiques," and "rythmes auditifs" to describe the state created by poetry. Just as the progression of movements in music impels the listener to hear the beginning of the piece once

he has heard the finale, the "mouvement périodique," of the poem urges the reader not to reach a specific end, but to become part of "un certain état." And, just as "la musique pure," refers to nothing in the world of "choses et des êtres," Valéry's poem "se désintéresse entièrement de la vue." The poem's "rythmes auditifs," which both create and excite the poetic movement are also reminiscent of music's "formules auditives exactes." Just as the auditory formulas refer solely to the musical universe, the auditory rhythms of the poem sustain the ongoing process of the poem itself.

Of all elements of music that Valéry admires, it is from music's natural expression of transformations that he draws his greatest inspiration. He asserts that his goal is to find a method or system through which he might express these transformations:

Je tente à mes risques et périls ce qu'ont tenté et accompli Faraday en physique, Riemann en mathématiques - Pasteur en biologie - et d'autres en musique... Essentiellement je cherche l'expression la plus conforme et la plus commode des transformations incessantes de la connaissance. (85)

Seen as the exact expression of "transformations incessantes," the principle of modulation captivates Valéry's poetic imagination more than any other aspect of music. Recognizing the power of modulation to express all ranges of changes in states from those scarcely perceptible to the most dramatic, Valéry proclaims that "l'idée de modulation comme je l'entends me ravit plus que toutes." (86) Valéry's particular understanding of modulation can be seen in

his use of the term in many of his essays. He employs the idea as a metaphor for changes in point of view or perception. Writing of the architecture of Notre Dame in his essay "Images de la France,"

Valéry associates the viewer's process with musical modulation:

...si vous portez votre attention sur les profils  
des formes de passage, des moulures, des nervures,  
des bandeaux, des arêtes qui conduisent l'oeil dans  
ses mouvements, vous trouverez dans la compréhension  
de ses moyens auxiliaires si simples en eux-mêmes,  
une impression comparable à celle que donne en  
musique l'art de moduler et de transporter  
insensiblement d'un état dans un autre une âme  
d'auditeur. (87)

In Valéry's statement that the many mouldings of Notre Dame "conduisent l'oeil dans ses mouvements," lies a key to his understanding of modulation. Valéry aims to direct the eye in its passage from one arch of the cathedral to the next; that is, he aims to trace the movement of our vision itself. As the paradigm of the expression of movement, modulation is Valéry's metaphor for such passage. The viewer of Notre Dame, following the "formes de passage" of the cathedral experiences changes in state like the listener of music. Valéry once again compares subtle differences in point of view to modulation in his essay "La 'peur des morts'." Of Frazer's examination of various "primitive" religions, he writes:

Rien de plus subtil que le passage presque  
insensible - analogue à une modulation - d'une  
croyance à une autre, à peine différente. (88)

Referring neither to music nor to language, Valéry associates "le

passage presque insensible," hardly noticeable changes or the slightest of movements from one belief to another, with modulation.

Valéry's attempt to poetically represent modulation is synonymous with his primary poetic objective: to discover a language through which he might express his perpetually changing perspective and the ever-changing world. In one of the earliest entries of "Ego Scriptor," Valéry outlines his aim to discover his own language in terms of modulation:

Programme anthropo-littéraire --Trouver les modulations bonne pour unir dans le même ouvrage les différentes activités - styles-moments d'un esprit - le mien. (89)

By entitling his program "anthropo-littéraire," Valéry stresses his goal of creating language anew for his own poetic ends. And to discover his own language is to find "les modulations." Valéry equates his search for a form through which he can represent the diversity of his own mind: "les différentes activités - styles - moments d'un esprit," with the concept of modulation.

Valéry again uses the term "modulation" to identify his search for a new science of language in the following notebook entry. Here, he explicitly states that such a science, constructed to express the passage of one way of seeing to another is poetic modulation:

Mon problème essentiel, fût, demeure, d'instituer une science des manières de voir...Il y a une science et un art de passer d'une manière de voir à une autre. MDV M·D·V Il y a une modulation. (90)

To construct a science of language that would intrinsically express changes in "modes de voir," or modulations is Valéry's central poetic objective. Such a "modulating" poetry would thus be able, like music, to express the movement that characterizes the world and our experience of the world.

## NOTES

- (1) Paul Valéry, "Nécessité de la poésie," Oeuvres I (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Gallimard, 1957) p.1381
- (2) Paul Valéry, "Au concert Lamoureux en 1893," Oeuvres II (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Gallimard, 1957) p.1272
- (3) Paul Valéry, "Au concert Lamoureux en 1893," p.1275
- (4) Paul Valéry, "Au concert Lamoureux en 1893," p.1272
- (5) Paul Valéry, "La conquête de l'ubiquité," Oeuvres II p.1285
- (6) Paul Valéry, "Léonard et les philosophes," Oeuvres I, p.1267
- (7) Paul Valéry, "Histoire d'Amphion (Mélodrame)," Oeuvres II p.1278
- (8) Paul Valéry, "Philosophie de la danse," Oeuvres I p.1401-2
- (9) Paul Valéry, "Regards sur la mer," Oeuvres II p.1339
- (10) Paul Valéry, "Philosophie de la danse," Oeuvres I p.1402
- (11) Paul Valéry, "L'Infini esthétique," Oeuvres II p.1344
- (12) Paul Valéry, "Propos sur la poésie," Oeuvres I p.1364
- (13) Paul Valéry, "Propos sur la poésie," Oeuvres I p.1369
- (14) Paul Valéry, "Sorte de préface," Oeuvres I p.685
- (15) Paul Valéry, "Calepin d'un poète," Oeuvres I p.1454
- (16) Paul Valéry, "Propos sur la poésie," Oeuvres I p.1366-67
- (17) Paul Valéry, "Propos sur la poésie," Oeuvres I p.1367
- (18) Paul Valéry, "Fragments des mémoires d'un poète," Oeuvres I p.1473

- (19) Paul Valéry, "Propos sur la poésie," Oeuvres I p.1363
- (20) Paul Valéry, "Propos sur la poésie," Oeuvres I p.1369
- (21) Paul Valéry, "Calepin d'un poète," Oeuvres I p.1448
- (22) Paul Valéry, "Poésie et pensée abstraite," Oeuvres I p.1333
- (23) Paul Valéry, "Léonard et les philosophes," Oeuvres I p.1257
- (24) Paul Valéry, "Léonard et les philosophes," Oeuvres I p.1256
- (25) Paul Valéry, "Première leçon du cours de poétique," Oeuvres I p.1340
- (26) Paul Valéry, "Souvenir de Nerval," Oeuvres I p.597
- (27) Paul Valéry, "Première leçon du cours de poétique," Oeuvres I p.1349
- (28) Paul Valéry, "Cantiques spirituels," Oeuvres I p.455
- (29) Paul Valéry, "Souvenirs littéraires," Oeuvres I p.784
- (30) Paul Valéry, "Poésie et pensée abstraite," Oeuvres I p.1325
- (31) Paul Valéry, "Stéphane Mallarmé," Oeuvres I p.664
- (32) Paul Valéry, "Stéphane Mallarmé," Oeuvres I p.667
- (33) Paul Valéry, "Stéphane Mallarmé," Oeuvres I p.667
- (34) Paul Valéry, "De la diction des vers," Oeuvres II p.1258
- (35) Paul Valéry, "Questions de poésie," Oeuvres I p.1294
- (36) Paul Valéry, "De la diction des vers," Oeuvres II p.1258
- (37) Paul Valéry, "Questions de poésie," Oeuvres I p.1293
- (38) Paul Valéry, "Cantiques spirituels," Oeuvres I p.450
- (39) Paul Valéry, "Stéphane Mallarmé," Oeuvres I p.667
- (40) Paul Valéry, "Stéphane Mallarmé," Oeuvres I p.667

- (41) Paul Valéry, "Victor Hugo," Oeuvres I p.584-85
- (42) Paul Valéry, "Première leçon du cours de poétique," Oeuvres I p.1343
- (43) Paul Valéry, "Poésie et pensée abstraite," Oeuvres I p.1314
- (44) Paul Valéry, "De la diction des vers," Oeuvres II p.1256
- (45) Paul Valéry, "De la diction des vers," Oeuvres II p.1256
- (46) Paul Valéry, "Lettre à Madame C." Oeuvres II p.1260
- (47) Paul Valéry, "De la diction des vers," Oeuvres II p.1255
- (48) Paul Valéry, "Fragments des mémoires d'un poème," Oeuvres I p.1478
- (49) Paul Valéry, "Première leçon du cours de poétique," Oeuvres I p.1356
- (50) Paul Valéry, "Philosophie," Cahiers I (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Gallimard, 1973) p.516
- (51) Paul Valéry, "Je disais quelquefois à Stéphane Mallarmé...," Oeuvres I p.649-50
- (52) Paul Valéry, "Langage," Cahiers I p.474
- (53) Paul Valéry, "Langage," Cahiers I p.473-74
- (54) Paul Valéry, "Langage," Cahiers I p.474
- (55) Paul Valéry, "Au sujet du Cimetière marin," Oeuvres I p.1497
- (56) Paul Valéry, "Au sujet du Cimetière Marin," Oeuvres I p.1501
- (57) Paul Valéry, "Note et Digression" Oeuvres I p.1226
- (58) Paul Valéry, "Une vue de Descartes," Oeuvres I p.824
- (59) Paul Valéry, "Victor Hugo," Oeuvres I p.583
- (60) Paul Valéry, "Philosophie," Cahiers I p.529
- (61) Paul Valéry, "Philosophie," Cahiers I p.524

- (62) Paul Valéry, "Philosophie," Cahiers I p.587
- (63) Paul Valéry, "Philosophie," Cahiers I p.521
- (64) Paul Valéry, "La France travaille," Oeuvres II p.1105
- (65) Paul Valéry, "Notre destin et les lettres," Oeuvres II p.1059
- (66) Paul Valéry, "Notre destin et les lettres," Oeuvres II p.1063
- (67) Paul Valéry, "Introduction à un dialogue sur l'art," Oeuvres II p.1037
- (68) Paul Valéry, "Questions de poésie," Oeuvres I p.1291
- (69) Paul Valéry, "Ego," Cahiers I p.89
- (70) Paul Valéry, "Histoire d'Amphion (Mélodrame)," Oeuvres II p.1277
- (71) Paul Valéry, "Ego," Cahiers I p.168
- (72) Paul Valéry, "Études et fragments sur le rêve," Oeuvres I p.932
- (73) Paul Valéry, "Ego Scriptor," Cahiers I p.299
- (74) Paul Valéry, "Nécessité de la poésie," Oeuvres I p.1388
- (75) Paul Valéry, "Philosophie," Cahiers I p.736
- (76) Paul Valéry, "Philosophie," Cahiers I p.731
- (77) Paul Valéry, "Langage," Cahiers I p.413
- (78) Paul Valéry, "Langage," Cahiers I p.437
- (79) Paul Valéry, "Système," Cahiers I p.775
- (80) Paul Valéry, "Les droits du poète sur la langue," Oeuvres II p.1264
- (81) Paul Valéry, "Ego Scriptor," Cahiers I p.235
- (82) Paul Valéry, "Système," Cahiers I p.800

- (83) Paul Valéry, "Système," Cahiers I p.793
- (84) Paul Valéry, "Poésie et pensée abstraite," Oeuvres I p.1330
- (85) Paul Valéry, "Système," Cahiers I p.775
- (86) Paul Valéry, "Ego Scriptor," Cahiers I p.297
- (87) Paul Valéry, "Images de la France," Oeuvres II p.1004
- (88) Paul Valéry, "La 'peur des morts'," Oeuvres I p.960
- (89) Paul Valéry, "Ego Scriptor," Cahiers I p.235
- (90) Paul Valéry, "Philosophie," Cahiers I p.628-29

## Chapter Two

### From Theory To Practice: A Musical Reading of Valéry's

#### "Profusion du Soir"

Un poème est pour moi un état d'une suite d'élaborations. Ceux que j'ai publiés sont à mes yeux de productions arrêtés par des circonstances étrangères. Et gardés, je les eusse transformés indéfiniment. (1)

In his critical writings, Valéry often protests the idea of a completed poem; he defines the poem by its process, the act that encompasses its creation. Written over a period of more than twenty years (1898 - 1922) and published in its final form after his greatest late poems were written, "Profusion du soir" is a testament to Valéry's belief in the act rather than the product of poetry. With the published poem's subtitle "poème abandonné," Valéry draws attention to its history, reminding the reader that "Profusion du soir" represents one stage in a continuous transformative process.

As its title suggests, "Profusion du soir" is not a fixed portrait of dusk, but a poem of evening as it permeates the universe. The poem occurs in the meeting between the poetic viewer (and sometimes speaker) and the waning light of day. As the sun dips lower in the sky, as its rays alter the earth's

contours, the viewer struggles to define his own vision. So engaged with the "promesses des cieux," he aims to create a work of art -- "Bâtir d'une vapeur un temple mémorable." The evening, however, inevitably descends into night and the viewer discovers that he can only achieve the permanence of his own changing perception. We are left with the solace of the viewer's reconciliation with the mystery of the world and his own incomplete attempt to circumscribe its vastness.

Valéry develops a number of themes in "Profusion du soir": the contemplative process, the relationship between heaven and earth, the mystery of the natural world, and the process of artistic creation. Yet, to assert that any one of these issues predominates over the others-- for instance, to maintain that "Profusion du soir" is a poem about writing poetry-- is to reduce its complexity. More than trying to express his thoughts on the nature of poetic composition or on the vastness of the universe, Valéry emphasizes the passage from dusk to darkness and the viewer's own inner passage from contemplation to creation. The themes are raised as he traces the movement of both the viewer's mind and the world, and are less central to the poem than are the acts themselves.

Although Valéry believes that a poem's form contains its value or meaning, the form of "Profusion du soir" has, until

recently, eluded its critics. Francis Scarfe perceives some of its central themes (for instance, the relationship between the viewer's consciousness of the "transmutation des idées" and the "changing forms of the universe"), yet he faults the transitions of the poem, attributing them to its unfinished nature, asserting that "though it does not lack a conclusion, its inner organisation is by no means clear." (2) Charles Whiting, too, maintains that "it is excessively vague and lacks unity," and argues that the value of "Profusion du soir" lies in its relation to his "greater works," notably, "La Jeune Parque" and "Le Cimetière marin". (3)

A change in the critical assessment of "Profusion du soir" comes with Lawler's essay, "L'Ange frais de l'oeil nu". (4) Through his examinations of the compositional history of the poem and the successive drafts in relation to the published version, Lawler, in contrast to the poem's earlier critics, maintains that

...it presupposes the formidable skill of Valéry's most productive years; that its imagery and structure, far from being vague, show astonishing precision; that it captures a unique cycle of thought, the gradual transmutation of an attitude in a sequence of clearly enunciated steps. (5)

"Profusion du soir" is, as Lawler contends, "the most uncompromising of Valéry's poems"; it is a consummate example

of the poet's belief in the fusion of form and meaning. (6) In his notebooks, Valéry outlines his objective to create a poetic language able to express "la grandeur du système pensée qui se transforme, le roulement des transformations." (7) Valéry does exactly this in "Profusion du soir." He ushers us at once into a world in the midst of change and into the viewer's evolving mind, presenting not a fixed portrait of either process. In order to draw the reader into these ongoing processes, to reproduce the movement of the evening and the viewer's quest, Valéry creates a form and language patterned, in large part, on his understanding of music. In "Profusion du soir" Valéry does not approximate musical form in its strictest or technical sense; yet, he comes closest here to transposing musical meaning to a poetic context. (8)

Unlike many of Valéry's poems, "Profusion du soir" initially appears irregular and loose in form. Though it opens with a tightly constructed sonnet, the twelve remaining stanzas vary widely in length and rhyme scheme. One voice does not unify these seemingly disparate stanzas; Valéry varies the use of an omniscient poetic voice with a first person address. The reader embarking on a first reading of "Profusion du soir" therefore can neither rely upon a familiar poetic form nor a consistent voice to guide him towards an understanding of the

poem.

In "Profusion du soir", however, Valéry does not lapse from his characteristic close attention to form. Because he is focusing on the viewer's contemplative process and the passage from day to night, he urges the reader, through the form of the poem, to concentrate on the nature of the movement from one stanza or section of the poem to the next. He encourages us, with the undefined relationship of the opening sonnet to the rest of the poem, to examine the movement of the poem itself.

Valéry does not self-consciously pattern "Profusion du soir" on a specific musical structure, nor does its form lend itself to an obvious musical parallel. However, looking at the poem with sonata form in mind, one can elucidate the sonnet's relationship to the whole as well as the poem's essentially circular structure. As a classical sonata-form consists of three movements -- exposition, development and recapitulation -- in which a composer states the central themes of the piece, draws them to a climax ultimately to return to the original themes, "Profusion du soir" is similarly circular, and may be seen to encompass three movements. The sonnet, or first movement, encapsulates the piece as a whole. In it Valéry sounds the key of the poem, presenting the language that echoes throughout its development while he delineates the movement of

the poem -- the transformation from contemplation to creation and from day to night. The remaining twelve stanzas compose the development of "Profusion du soir"; in them Valéry traces precisely the same transformative process. Yet, in contrast to the sonnet's tight form in which he emphasizes the movement from vision to creation and sunlight to starlight, in the development's varying, generally longer stanzas, Valéry reveals in greater detail the process behind both transformations. We hear the range of tones accompanying the viewer's inner process and see how the variations in light affect the surrounding skyscape.

Valéry often discusses the regenerative nature of poetic form, insisting that the end of a poem does not signal its completion. Rather, he argues that the last lines of the poem, more than resolving into a finite meaning, should urge the reader to re-enact the poem. Valéry encourages such a reading of "Profusion du soir." Though the last stanzas of the poem climactically portray the darkness that threatens the speaker's vision, its final lines, calling for acceptance of mystery, recall the language of the sonnet. Closing the poem with an ellipsis (...), Valéry thus urges the reader to return to the poem's exposition. The final movement of "Profusion du soir", then, is a "recapitulation" of the sonnet. Similar to the way a

sonata's recapitulation is enriched by the listener's experience of the development, we re-read (or listen once again to) the sonnet with a fuller understanding of its language and themes.

While the analogy between "Profusion du soir" and sonata-form remains speculative (that is, it allows us to perceive the poem's circularity more than it posits any simulation of musical form), Valéry self-consciously musicalizes language in the poem. The composer/musician, Valéry maintains, is able to express "les roulements des transformations" due to the precision of his system and its intrinsic mobility. For the poet to do so he must recreate language -- "Redissoudre et faire recristalliser les relations". (9) In "Profusion du soir" Valéry creates a self-enclosed system of language analogous to the musical system he admires; the language reinforces the circularity of its overall structure, helps to create the sense of a world distinct from the practical world and enables him to represent the mobility and transformations so naturally expressed in musical form.

Valéry employs an extremely restricted vocabulary in "Profusion du soir," repeating key words up to five times ("oeil," "Dieu," "soir," among others). The entire poem echoes

with the use of such "mots-musique" and these echoes contribute to the circularity of its structure. For rather than guiding the reader through a linear progression to the close of the poem, Valéry, regularly, with the use of "resonances" refers the reader back to previous stanzas.

Such a limited vocabulary enables Valéry, like the composers he admires, to create a world distinct from the world of discursive language. James Lawler comments on the poem's repetition and Valéry's creation of a poetic world: "Such repetitions musicalize the poem, compose a scheme of sound and sense which serves to distance it from the domain of referential language." (10) With each successive sounding of a particular word, Valéry distances its use in the poem from its representational function. The reader, rather than substituting a specific meaning for each word, looks to its relation to previous usages in the poem; each key word then assumes a value intrinsic to the poem itself.

The succession of key words in the poem enables Valéry to create a sense of movement analogous to the musical mobility created by the progression of notes. As words such as "or," "soleil," "oeil," "feu," etc. are repeated against the changing backdrop of the advancing evening, they, too, may be perceived as changing or moving.

Valéry maintains that a poet preserves the musical essence of poetry through his development of the poetic voice; only through its voice can the poetic language resonate and impel the movement of the poem. In "Profusion du soir" Valéry voices the poem with a viewer/speaker and an omniscient narrator. Although the variation in voicing seems responsible for the poem's apparently rambling structure, it is precisely this dual voicing that focuses the reader's attention on the form and movement of the poem rather than on a specific theme or idea. In order to follow the poem, the reader must pay careful attention to changes in perspective; such transitions reinforce the circular structure, for as the voice changes, for example, from the viewer's exclamatory tones to the more muted omniscient voice, the reader is prompted to examine what sounded before as much as he questions what is to come. We might keep in mind Valéry's definition of poetry: "Un poème est un discours qui exige et qui entraîne une liaison continuée entre la voix qui est et la voix qui vient et qui doit venir" (11) With the two voices in "Profusion du soir" Valéry ensures that the reader will be attentive to the presence and evolution of the voice.

At the same time as the voicing in "Profusion du soir" encourages the reader to examine the form of the poem more

closely, it also directs us toward its meaning. As we simultaneously follow the viewer's and the omniscient narrator's voices, we trace the viewer's passage from contemplation to creation in the context of the ever-dimming evening. Valéry defines modulation as "science des manières de voir -- passer d'une manière à une autre." (12) "Profusion du soir" is a poem of passage or modulation from one point of view to another. More than he describes the sunset or the viewer's route to creation, Valéry aims to trace the passage from one way of seeing to the next -- the modulating tones of the viewer and the evening.

Du Soleil soutenant la puissante paresse  
 Qui plane et s'abandonne à l'oeil  
 contemplateur,  
 Regard! ... Je bois le vin céleste, et je  
 caresse  
 Le grain mystérieux de l'extrême hauteur.

Je porte au sein brûlant ma lucide tendresse,  
 Je joue avec les feux de l'antique inventeur;  
 Mais le dieu par degrés qui se désintéresse  
 Dans la pourpre de l'air s'altère avec lenteur.

Laisant dans le champ pur battre toute l'idée,  
 Les travaux du couchant dans la sphere vidée  
 Connaissent sans oiseaux leur entière grandeur.

L'Ange frais de l'oeil nu present dans sa  
 pudeur.  
 Haute nativité d'étoile élucidée,  
 Un diamant agir qui berce la splendeur. (I-IV)  
 (13)

In the opening sonnet or exposition of "Profusion du

soir," Valéry delineates the broad movement of the poem, sounding its essential tone and establishing the language that resounds to its close. Much as a composer introduces in concentrated form the melodic lines of his composition in the first movement, Valéry sets out, in sharply defined tones, the passage from contemplation to creation and from day to night, the movement that characterizes the piece as a whole. In the first stanza, he introduces the voices of the poem: the omniscient voice that presents the sun to the viewer, and the viewer/speaker, who, contemplating the light, explores its mysterious power. The viewer's voice continues into the second stanza, though here he does more than reflect upon the nature of the sun. In the passage from the first to the second quatrain, Valéry introduces the idea of creation as the viewer internalizes the sun's power. Its light and warmth illuminate his sensibility and ignite a desire to create a vision analogous to the sun's. At the same time as the viewer recognizes his own quest, the sun sinks progressively lower, changing the light of the evening sky. The viewer then recedes from the sonnet, and in the first tercet Valéry presents a portrait of pure contemplation; a picture of the universe in all its vastness. Without the sounds of birds (or the voice of the viewer), the universe is unified in itself. In the fourth

stanza, Valéry fully effects the transformation from day to night and from contemplation to creation. He counterbalances the opening image of the setting sun with the closing image of the rising star, the culmination of both the progression of evening and the viewer's contemplative process.

As we have mentioned earlier, Valéry does not explicitly trace the transformations sketched out in the opening sonnet through the narration of one distinct voice. As Lawler asserts, he "purposefully rejects at every moment the temptation to yield to description, or narrative or precise myth." (14) Rather, in the sonnet Valéry tunes our ears to the scale through which he develops the self-enclosed musical language of the poem. It is only by examining how he introduces particular images and words in the sonnet, how these images evolve and resonate, that we can perceive the transformations that compose the sonnet and "Profusion du soir" in its entirety.

Du Soleil soutenant la puissante paresse  
 Qui plane et s'abandonne à l'oeil contemplateur,  
 Regard! ... Je bois le vin céleste, et je caresse  
 Le grain mystérieux de l'extrême hauteur. (I)

As a composer presents the essential melody in the first movement of a sonata, Valéry introduces the voices of the poem, the omniscient voice and the viewer, and begins to establish the dynamic between them in the opening stanza. His

presentation of the principal voices and images -- the sun and contemplative eye -- sets the tone for the poem. We gain our initial perception of the sunset and viewer not through any direct description, but through the form and pace of the lines, the sound pattern and the way that Valéry juxtaposes both voices and images.

An omniscient voice hails the sun in the first two lines, sounding its pervasive presence in the poem. At its highest point in the sky at the sonnet's onset, it is not a fixture of decided permanence; it is a sun struggling to maintain itself-- "...soutenant la puissante paresse"--powerful, yet lazy. Fighting to sustain its eminent position, the sun's light is not stationary; it "...plane et s'abandonne...", giving itself over to one who watches (and the sonnet's next "key" image), "l'oeil contemplateur."

The sun does not appear in the poem only to vanish. Though its power dissipates, its declining rays determine the viewer's vision, coloring the surrounding universe. Valéry emphasizes the sun's importance and continuing presence in the structure and sound pattern of the first two lines.

Progressing without a pause, the opening lines approximate the sunlight's sweeping movement. The sun also lingers in the sound pattern; Valéry repeats the "s" throughout the first line

and into the second: "Du Soleil soutenant la puissante paresse/ Qui plane et s'abandonne...," thereby creating its auditory presence. The "s" coupled with long vowels, particularly repeated long "a" sounds, elongate the lines, creating the effect of the lengthening rays of the evening sun.

Valéry establishes the locus of the poem in the present moment in his use of the present participle "soutenant," stressing the ongoing nature of the sun's struggle. Likewise, the simple present "qui plane et s'abandonne," directs us to the viewer, further defining the immediacy of the present moment.

While the sun's rays soar to meet "l'oeil contemplateur," they do not reach beyond him. Rather, the image of the contemplative eye creates a natural pause in the line, for the eye that contemplates reflects upon something. Valéry thus closes the second line with the first image suggestive of the poem's circularity. "L'oeil contemplateur" visually complements the opening "Soleil," prompting the reader to associate the greater eye of the universe with the eye of one who contemplates it. Valéry also subtly creates an echo of "soleil" in the "s" and long "a" sounds that resound through the first two lines together with the sounding of "l'oeil". Through such visual and auditory echoes Valéry signals the

importance of particular words in the poem ("soleil" and "oeil" are key words) and begins to create the circularity characteristic of the poem as a whole. Such echoes prompt the reader to return to the opening image of the poem more than they encourage him to proceed to the next lines.

Regard!...Je bois le vin céleste et je caresse  
Le grain mystérieux de l'extrême hauteur. (I,3-4)

The exclamatory command "Regard!..." shifts the perspective from the heights of the sun to the viewer's eye. In the next two lines, Valéry sets forth the dynamic or melody of the poem: The viewer defines himself in relation to the sun. He does not simply watch the external scene; rather, with actions suggesting religious ritual (communion), he internalizes the sun's power, drinking in the "vin céleste," touching its elusive grandeur.

Valéry signals a change in perspective not through description or narration but in the form of the lines and in the sounds of the language. In contrast to the omniscient voice sinuously tracing the movement of the sun's light are the viewer's direct statements: "Je bois... et je caresse..." Unlike the fluidity of the omniscient narrator's lines, those of the viewer contain two pauses. A change in sound also heralds the shift in perspective: The first part of the stanza is characterized by a tonal unity while the viewer's voice is

marked by a larger variety of sounds -- long and short vowels and a greater number of consonants.

While the viewer's direct actions would seem to lead the reader into a sequence of steps toward a definite end, the metaphorical language of the lines, with both abstract and sensory associations, thwarts any such expectation. Valéry often insists (in his poetics, notably in "Poésie et pensée abstraite") that in order to undercut a reader's habit of searching for finite meaning in discursive language, the poet must exploit the sound values and ambiguities of words; he thus obliges the reader to repeat the words, to listen more closely, and to be more attentive to their multiple meanings. (15) The viewer's first words "Je bois le vin..." with its sensory association appears to simply narrate his action, yet what he drinks is not wine, but the wine-red colors of the heavens. Likewise, the viewer's next statement-- "...et je caresse/ Le grain mystérieux de l'extrême hauteur" readies the reader for a further description of the nature of the "grain" and what it feels like to the viewer's touch. Yet, rather than providing such sensory description, the next few words puncture our expectations; what the viewer caresses is the airy and intangible "grain" of the sun's heights. With the final word of the stanza, "hauteur," Valéry further urges the reader to

pause and reflect upon the circularity of the stanza. The extreme heights that the viewer "caresses" recall the initial images of the sun, sending us back to ponder the poem's opening words.

Je porte au sein brûlant ma lucide tendresse,  
 Je joue avec les feux de l'antique inventeur;  
 Mais le dieu par degrés qui se désintéresse  
 Dans la pourpre de l'air s'altère avec lenteur. (II)

Creating a sense of continuity in the movement from the first to the second quatrain, the viewer narrates his actions (lines one and two) at the same time as the sun gradually recedes from the scene (lines three and four). The world of the second stanza differs only slightly from that of the first. Valéry enforces the bond between them in their similar forms: The principal voices, the viewer/speaker and omniscient narrator, remain the same, and the rhyme scheme and verb tense are unchanged.

Much as a composer elaborates on the melody set forth in the opening bars as his exposition progresses, Valéry further develops the dynamic between the main figures and voices -- the sunset and viewer -- as his exposition unfolds. As the viewer watches and absorbs the still powerful sun (line one), he identifies it as part of himself. No longer distinct from the sun, its fire characterizes the viewer's breast ("sein

brûlant") and illuminates his sensibility ("lucide tendresse"). Emboldened by his inner fire and clear vision, the viewer then equates his own ideas of creation with the sun's, now a god, or "l'antique inventeur."

The viewer's direct statements and physical actions, "Je porte..." (1) and "Je joue...", at first indicate a precise goal. But as in the previous stanza, his metaphorical language directs the reader to no such discursive resolution. While the verbs "porter" and "jouer" may first suggest a clear exterior aim, what follows is increasingly interior. The viewer carries nothing so concrete as his own desire and feeling, and plays with, not the flames of physical fire, but with his idea of the sun's power. The viewer's "lucide tendresse" particularly encourages the reader to listen once again to the language; while "tendresse" refers to the heart or breast (the seat of feeling), "lucide" points to light and reason. The language of the first two lines points to the exterior only to lead us further into the viewer's inner world, and mingles words of the heart with those of the mind. The resulting ambiguity once again prompts the reader to listen more attentively to the language, to re-experience the poem more than it creates finite meaning.

Although Valéry does not repeat the words "soleil" and

"oeil" throughout the second stanza, he employs images (and/or metaphors) that consistently suggest their ongoing presence in the poem, referring us back to the previous stanza. The viewer's voice, "je", echoes the "je" in stanza one and recalls "l'oeil contemplateur." Likewise, the images of light and fire: "sein brûlant," "lucide tendresse," "les feux de l'antique inventeur," all emanate from the opening image of the sun. In his presentation of such a tight network of images, Valéry constructs the contours of his enclosed poetic universe. Through his use of images that recall previous images, he draws the reader into a world increasingly distinct from the world outside the poem.

While the use of a tight system of images defines or encloses the poetic world, the range of connotative association within the poem widens. The sun not only corresponds to the declining sun in the sky; it also evokes the hues that its dissipation creates, a notion of its texture, as well as its effect on the viewer (his inner sun and sense of his own power).

Mais le dieu par degrés qui se désintéresse  
 Dans la pourpre de l'air s'altère avec lenteur.  
 (II,3-4)

At the same moment that the viewer recognizes his own creative aims, the sun's power declines and day cedes to night.

To emphasize the simultaneity of the viewer's discovery and onset of evening, Valéry retains the present tense and marks the transition from the viewer's voice to that of the omniscient narrator with a semi-colon. Although he uses the simple present tense throughout the quatrains, Valéry subtly suggests the progression of evening in the language of the second quatrain's closing lines. While each verb up to this point indicates a certain stasis or a presence (notably the viewer's verbs -- "bois," "caresse," "porte," "joue,"), the verbs in these lines indicate a slow, but steady movement in time. The sun-god gradually recedes from the external scene, "se désintéresse," and its light gradually changes-- "s'altère avec lenteur."

Valéry also creates a sense of the advancing evening through the fusion of sound and meaning. Internal rhyme and repetition characterize line three -- "D" and "é" echo through the line as if to approximate each of the sun's scarcely perceptible steps: "Mais le dieu par degrés qui se désintéresse." And, as the dissipating sun changes the color of the wine-red sky (stanza 1) to purple, so the sounds subtly change -- "Dans la pourpre de l'air s'altère avec lenteur." Each vowel sound coupled with the consonant "r" is a gentle variation (and elongation) of the one before -- "pourpre" --

"l'air" -- "s'altère" -- "lenteur".

While at the close of the quatrains we have become familiar with the voices of sun (the omniscient narrator) and viewer and their relations, the tercets suggest an altered world. Both principal figures recede from the poem as the omniscient voice carries us into the world of evening and night, into the pure contemplative moment and the starlit skies. However, though the last two stanzas certainly intimate a changed world, it is not totally disengaged from the world presented in the quatrains. Though the scene is changing, the language continually reflects back upon previously heard sounds and words, encouraging the reader to examine the nature of the change that has taken place. While the sonnet does not strictly follow the pattern of a musical exposition, if we extend our musical metaphor, we might say that in the tercets Valéry modulates the opening material. The last two stanzas respond to the quatrains; the pure moment of stanza three and the star in stanza four grow out of the sun's descent and the viewer's contemplation. More than representing a radically different world without sun and viewer, the tercets express a "manière de voir," the world seen from the vantage point of one of its manifold moments, part of an ever-recurring cycle of change. (16)

Laissant dans le champ pur battre toute l'idée,  
 Les travaux du couchant dans la sphere vidée  
 Connaissent sans oiseaux leur entière grandeur. (III)

The gradual disappearance of the sun-god threatens our ability to see the skies and consequently the viewer's creative vision. In stanza three, Valéry ushers us into a world hovering between absence -- the world without the power of the sun and without the voice of the viewer -- and presence -- the pure world of contemplation; empty yet vast, still, yet moving.

The first words of the stanza "Laissant dans le champ pur" suggest a world deprived of the sun. The viewer's voice has receded from the poem and we no longer see the changing colors that accompany the waning light. Yet without the distracting tones of the viewer's presence and his perception of the skies in their changing aspect, we may perceive the presence of another world -- the totality of the contemplative moment. Valéry draws on the etymological meaning of "pur" in his image of the field as a "champ pur", at once suggesting the physical field in the absence of the viewer and sun and the perfect or absolute field of contemplation. Throughout the stanza Valéry uses a language of the absolute; he delicately balances words that underline the sun's and viewer's absence and those that evoke the presence of a world beyond them. In line one, for example, though "Laissant" and "champ pur" remind us of the

world emptied of the viewer and sun, in their place is a struggle of the whole idea -- "Laissant dans le champ pur battre toute l'idée." In the pure field we find not the struggle of a particular idea (or the viewer's individual quest) nor a multiplicity of ideas, but the infinite contemplative process ("battre" is in the infinitive) that draws the many into the one -- "toute l'idée."

Valéry continues to present a vision of the world at once empty, yet complete in itself in lines two and three. In contrast to the partial views of sunset in stanzas one and two (the rays that soar to the "l'oeil contemplateur" and the purple skies), "Les travaux du couchant" point to the process of sunset as a whole. However, at the same time Valéry evokes the presence of the workings of sunset, the world, or sphere in which it occurs is a "sphère vidée." In line three, Valéry once again emphasizes the emptiness of this world in auditory terms; it is a silent sphere -- "sans oiseaux." However, despite (or because of) its emptiness and silence, the contemplative world is one cognizant of its own greatness -- "Connaissent sans oiseaux leur entière grandeur."

In his use of a language of the absolute, Valéry evokes both the bareness and promise of the contemplative moment, yet he does not suggest that his reader decide whether this

particular moment of dusk be defined primarily by its emptiness or fullness. Valéry suggests throughout his essays and notebooks that the reader should note the relations between the various words that the poet uses more than search for a precise meaning. (17) Valéry's words in stanza three at once referring to the emptiness of the sunless field and its contemplative possibilities do not contradict each other; rather, by fusing seemingly opposing images Valéry suggests that this contemplative moment is not fixed; its emptiness evokes its unity, its unity its vastness.

Valéry invites the reader to linger in the suspended moment (the world suspended between light and dark, vision and nothingness) through the sound pattern of the stanza. Sound repetitions, internal rhyme and assonance pervade its three lines and create an echoing effect ; "couchant" echoes "laissant" and "champ"; "oiseaux" echoes "travaux"; "entière," "sphère"; "vidée" echoes "les" and "idée", and grandeur," "leur" (and to a lesser extent, "pur"). With such a restricted sound pattern, Valéry refers the reader to previous soundings of particular tones, drawing us into the world of the contemplative moment.

Also encouraging us to pause or rest in the self-enclosed contemplative "sphere" are the stanza's three verbs.

"Laisant," the present participle, contributes to our sense of the contemplative process as ongoing and "battre," in the infinitive, suggests the infinite nature of this struggle of thought. And, "Connaissent," the only present tense verb, calls our attention to the self-contained knowledge of sunset.

In this empty and silent world the only action is the contemplative acceptance of the workings of sunset.

Les travaux du couchant dans la sphère vidée  
Connaissent sans oiseaux leur entière grandeur. (III, 2-3)

Without the viewer to focus on a particular shaft of light (its wine-red or purple colors that designate a specific point in time), without the sounds of birds that partition their entire quiet, the sunset is whole. Its progress, as one color succeeds the next, more than suggesting decline, indicates its unity. While sunset descends to night, night once again gives way to light, which in turn yields to dusk. "Les travaux du couchant," unlike the viewer, know ("Connaissent") the circularity of their own process so that each part is a whole. With such knowledge or acceptance of the changing natural forms of the universe, each moment encompasses the infinite.

Valéry represents the circularity of both the sunset and contemplation in the pace of lines two and three, and by his emphasis of particular rhymes. Lines two and three progress without a pause; the only words between "Les travaux du

couchant" and "leur entière grandeur" indicate the absence of any obstruction -- "sphère videe" and "sans oiseaux." Valéry creates a steady pace only to turn the reader back to reflect upon the "entière grandeur" of "les travaux du couchant." He stresses the circularity of sunset and thought with the internal rhyme "sphère"/"entière"; at the same time the "sphère" is the "champ pur," the field or space wherein the sunset and thought occur, it is also global and circular. The "travaux du couchant" know their own greatness in their knowledge and acceptance of their changing, yet ever-recurring nature.

The moment presented in stanza three, while whole unto itself, is nevertheless bound to the moments of the first two stanzas -- the sun's declining rays and the viewer's vision of the skies. The tight sound pattern of stanza three contributes to both the circularity within the stanza and of the sonnet as a whole. Each tone in stanza three echoes those previously heard. The closing word of stanza three "grandeur," echoes the "b" rhyme in the sonnet as a whole: "contemplateur," "hauteur," "inventeur," "lenteur." The end-rhyme added in the tercets "é" (as in "idée") echoes the repetitive "é" in line three of the previous stanza ("idée" and vidée" echoes "le dieu par degrés qui se désintéresse") The opening word of the

stanza "Laissant" as well as "couchant" likewise echo the present participles in the quatrains, "soutenant" and "brulant." And the "sphère vidée" and "entière grandeur" of sunset echo the musical evocation of sunset in the closing lines of stanza two -- "Dans la pourpre de l'air s'altère avec lenteur."

Just as the tonal repetition within stanza three draws the reader further into the contained world of the stanza, so the sounds that recall the rhyme scheme and similar sounds in the quatrains serve to unify the poetic world of the sonnet. With each sounding of a tone that echoes a previous tone, the language, more than referring to meaning outside the poem, develops a meaning or sense intrinsic to the poem itself.

Valéry often writes that we ascend from sound to meaning in poetry; through the repetition of sound then, he not only sets the poetic world of the sonnet apart from the world outside the poem, but also unifies the poem in terms of meaning (hence the inseparability of form and meaning, sound and sense).

(18) The sound structure replaces any explicit structures of description and thematically unifies the sonnet. As the language of stanza three refers the reader back to earlier sounds in the sonnet, so it establishes a bond between the contemplative moment, the sun's gradual withdrawal, and the

viewer's perception and ambitions.

L'Ange frais de l'oeil nu pressent dans sa pudeur.  
Haute nativité d'étoile élucidée,  
Un diamant agir qui berce la splendeur... (IV)

At the same time we (and the "travaux du couchant") recognize the totality of the passing moment (in stanza three), sunset gives way to night. Threatening as the darkness is, night does not blacken the universe but, rather, permits starlit vision of a different sort. In the final tercet, Valéry effects the transformation from day to night and presents the light of its first star, the product of both the evolving sunset and the viewer's vision.

The light of the star opening stanza four, "L'Ange frais de l'oeil nu," visually complements the sun with which the sonnet begins. Yet, Valéry emphasizes the changes that have taken place in the time between the sun's decline and nightfall in his presentation of the evening star. In contrast to the languorous, yet powerful rays of sun that open the poem, the evening star, full of energy, hurries to appear. Unlike the declining sun struggling to maintain its established power, the evening star is rising. Yet to be born, it modestly presses its being against the night air.

As he does in previous stanzas, Valéry constructs stanza four using a very restricted sound pattern. The predominant

tone "é" which resonates throughout ("frais," "nativité," "d'étoile," "éluclidée") together with long "a" and "u" unify the stanza ("L'Ange," "diamant," "agir," ; "nu," "pudeur," "elucidee," "splendeur"). Such a tight sound pattern once again creates a self-enclosed quality in the stanza.

In addition to the rhyme scheme which draws together end-rhymes from the three previous stanzas, Valéry repeats both sounds and entire words from throughout the sonnet. "L'oeil nu" and "pressent" echo the "l'oeil contemplateur" and "paresse" of stanza one. "Haute" in line two recalls "l'extrême hauteur" of the opening stanza as well. "L'étoile élucidée" echoes the viewer's "lucide tendresse" of stanza two. And the "diamant" of the sonnet's final line draws together sounds from each preceding stanza: "soutenant" (1), "puissante" (1), "plane" (1) "s'abandonne" (1), "brûlant" (2), "laissant" and "couchant" (3). In addition then to the unity of the stanza itself, Valéry establishes the unity of the sonnet as a whole. The final stanza is so tightly constructed that each word, either in sound or meaning, refers to one previously sounded. By consistently referring the reader back to words and sounds of former lines, Valéry emphasizes the self-referential nature of the poem.

The repetition of sounds and words in the final tercet

does more than create the self-enclosed world of the particular stanza and the unity of the sonnet. It is through such repetitions that Valéry emphasizes the change from sunlight to starlight. By examining how each word rings in comparison to how it sounded before (by examining the relations between words and sounds), we can illuminate the nature of the transformation that occurs.

L'Ange frais de l'oeil nu present dans sa pudeur. (IV, 1)

The world of the final tercet hardly threatens the absence of the previous stanza. With his first image, Valéry pierces the silence of the previous stanza with a new vision. Not yet completely visible, "L'Ange frais de l'oeil nu" hastens toward its position in the sky. In the succession of one syllable words Valéry approximates its steady movement in the pace of the line.

That the world in which "L'Ange frais" appears is a world transformed is clear from the way each word in line one causes us to reflect back upon previous words and images; the new angel that appears is at once the culmination of sunset and the creation of the viewer's contemplative vision. Its appearance, following as it does the "travaux du couchant" signals the transition from day to night. Valéry also portrays the passage of time in the angel's coolness. In contrast to the opening

sun, still powerful enough to ignite the viewer's breast, the rising star in the closing tercet is cool. Valéry urges the reader through the cool light of evening to recall the fire and heat of earlier stanzas. Without a word of description he thus effects the transition from day to night.

Valéry also provokes the reader to associate the evening star with the sun with auditory echoes. The latter part of line one, "pressent dans sa pudeur", echoes the sun's "puissante paresse." Though "paresse" and "pressent" create a similar sound, the absence of one vowel ("a") indicates the difference between the two stars and the change that has occurred. As day succeeds to night, the swift movement of the evening star takes the place of the declining and lazy movement of the sun. The differing characters of the two stars also indicate a change; in contrast to the sun's power with which he tries to maintain his position in the sky is the modesty which guides the evening angel to his position in the heavens.

The same words and images in line one that echo the sun's image simultaneously recall the viewer's contemplative process. At the same time as the figure of the angel is a spiritual image corresponding to the heavenly image of the sun (1), the "antique inventeur" (2) and the disappearing god(2), it is also the intermediary between the heavens and the earth, the sun-god

and viewer. Its coolness ("L'Ange frais") urges the reader not only to reflect upon the sun's warmth, but also the viewer's "sein brûlant" and his playing "avec les feux de l'antique inventeur." With the striking echo "L'oeil nu"/"l'oeil contemplateur", Valéry establishes the angel as a product of the viewer's vision and provokes the reader to examine the change that has taken place. No longer the eye that contemplates the sun's power, the eye of the closing stanza is "l'oeil nu," one that beholds the angel of his own vision. (19) "Nu" echoes the long "u" sounds in "brûlant," "lucide," and "pur"; through such a continuity of sound Valéry encourages the reader to reflect upon the process traced in the movement from stanza to stanza. The "l'oeil contemplateur" is transformed into the "l'oeil nu", not by any external agent, but through its own process. And the angel that is born is a product not only of the heavens, but of the viewer's inner fire and desire to build something beyond himself ("sein brulant" and "lucide tendresse" of stanza two) as well as his acceptance of the "champ pur," the ever changing workings of the universe and his place within it.

Haute nativité d'étoile élucidée, (IV, 2)

The hardly perceptible evening star of line one is born and fully positioned in the sky in the above line. Valéry

expresses the moment of its birth in the most concentrated line of the sonnet. Without a single verb, Valéry indicates the time and place of the star's appearance. With the first word "Haute," Valéry points us skyward, and in the rest of the line ("nativité d'étoile élucidée," ), with the rapid succession of staccato-like "é" sounds, he approximates in sound the precise moment of its appearance.

In line two Valéry repeats sounds that echo those of previous stanzas and words that recall earlier images, once more urging the reader to reflect upon the passage from one moment to the next. The sharp "é" sounds that mark the birth of the evening star echo the repeated "é" sounds in stanza two that traced the steps of the withdrawing sun ("Mais le dieu par degrés qui se désintéresse..."). Through such an echo Valéry marks the passage from the setting sun to the rising star, the passage in time from sunset to night.

Valéry also traces the passage from the viewer's contemplative process to the creation of a work of art (his angel or star) in the repetition of entire words. The birth of the heavenly star, the "haute nativite" echoes the viewer's exploration, his caressing "Le grain mystérieux de l'extrême hauteur" in stanza one. While in the earlier stanza, there lies a great distance between the viewer and the heavens, in

the final tercet, the star is born of his vision. Valéry emphasizes through the repetition of "haute" that this star is not only a star of heaven, but also one bound to the viewer's vision. The "seen" star, "l'étoile élucidée," also echoes the viewer's "lucide tendresse." But, while in stanza two he carries the light and clarity of his feeling within himself ("Je porte au sein brûlant ma lucide tendresse"), here that vision has brought forth a star, "l'étoile élucidée." With the past participle "élucidée", Valéry stresses the accomplishment of the creative act. What was internal ("lucide tendresse") has been transformed into the visible ("l'étoile élucidée").

While in the opening stanza of "Profusion du soir" the sun is suspended high above the viewer of the poem, by its closing lines, the distance between them has been bridged. The image of the star's birth, "nativité" (instead of "naissance"), further emphasizes the bond between heaven and earth. For "nativité" both refers to divine birth and the position of the heavenly bodies at the precise moment of birth; that is, it simultaneously points to heaven and earth.

Un diamant agir qui berce la splendeur...

Valéry once again highlights the earthly nature of the evening star in the final image of the sonnet. "Diamant" echoes sounds from throughout the sonnet, thus recalling the

sunset and the viewer's contemplative process. With a single word, Valéry urges the reader to reflect upon the sun hanging in the heavens ("Soleil soutenant la puissante paresse"), the viewer's breast burning with the fires of creation ("Je porte au sein brûlant ma lucide tendresse"), the vast world in the absence of the sun ("Laissant dans le champ pur...") and the entire workings of sunset ("les travaux du couchant"). The diamond draws the poem together; though of the earth, it is transformed through the contemplative and creative processes into a star.

Though the diamond (angel and star) expresses the bond between heaven and earth, it is not a fixed image. The diamond as culmination both of sunset and the viewer's creative process is as infinitely moving as the world in which it appears. As he uses "battre" in stanza three to underline the never-ending and ever-transformable process of thought, so in the final image of the sonnet Valéry uses the infinitive "agir" to emphasize that the act that creates the diamond is boundless. Perhaps drawing on a sixteenth century definition of "agir" -- "Faire quelque chose, avoir une activité qui transforme ce qui est..." -- "agir" both represents the transformative process that creates the diamond-star and indicates that such a transformative process may never be fixed. Though a point of

vision in the sky, it "acts" not toward a finite or still point, but to illuminate the universal movement of which it is a part.

Valéry closes the sonnet with an ellipsis, thus urging the reader to return to its opening words. Expressive of the natural process of sunset and the viewer's creative aims (and accomplishment) the sonnet, like the angel, star, and diamond, does not reach a finite point. Rather, as musical form tends to inspire regeneration, the opening sonnet to "Profusion du soir" represents one stage in an ever-changing transformative process.

In the development of "Profusion du soir," Valéry traces the same transformative processes as he does in the sonnet -- dusk's turning to night and the viewer's evolution from a contemplative to a creative state. Rather than reiterating the sonnet, however, these next twelve stanzas provide more depth and background to the sonnet's broad movements. As a composer elaborates on the melodies put forth in the exposition, drawing them to a climax in the second movement, Valéry similarly explores the principal figures of the poem (dusk skies and viewer) in greater detail, and extends the range of the poem's voices, building towards the poetic climax. In contrast to the swift movement of the sonnet, where the night star quickly

replaces the declining sun and the viewer's contemplative pose is fast transposed into the angel of his vision, in the development, neither process is so efficiently achieved. Rather, we see and listen to the viewer grope towards his vision and watch the deceptive shades of the dissipating day. As the tension between the viewer's ambitions -- his aim to build an image of permanence out of the passing evening -- and the evening's advance mounts, as darkness threatens to obscure his sight, Valéry draws the development to a climax and, in the penultimate stanza, the viewer desperately grasps at his "belles images" as night envelopes them.

In order to build towards the climax of the development, Valéry uses a form and language that, like musical form and notation, turn our attention to the way in which the poem moves rather than to any finite thematic resolution. The most important structural features of the development that encourage the reader to attend to the movement of the mind and world (viewer and sunset) include the alternating voices -- viewer and omniscient narrator -- and the widely varying stanza forms and changing rhythms.

Valéry pulls the reader into the very substance of the viewer's modulating experience in the dual voicing of the poem. As the omniscient narrator's muted tones yield to the viewer's

excited ones, and as his own desperate outcries give way to the softer tones of his reasoning discourse, we look not for the one ultimate or true perspective of evening, but rather to grasp the transformative principles underlying these shifting perspectives.

The twelve stanzas of the development do not progress smoothly. Rather than providing a conventional form or an explicit chronological sequence that facilitates the reader's passage from one moment of the viewer's quest to the next, Valéry presents us with a series of stanzas which stand as distinct units. Their markedly differing structures -- they range in length from four to thirteen lines, and each stanza possesses its own rhyme scheme -- underscore their distinctiveness rather than their unity. Their varying rhythms also distinguish them from each other; some stanzas progress haltingly, others smoothly, while still others with a hurried pace.

Ironically, it is through the autonomous nature of the stanzas that Valéry draws us into the substance of the viewer's quest as he comes to grips with the vastness of the external world. By creating distinct units of each of the viewer's moods and of each moment of dusk as it passes into evening, Valéry asks that the reader participate in the very process of

the viewer's self-discovery and the declining day, encouraging us to actively probe the relationship between these disparate moments and how they pass from one to the next.

With all of Valéry's attention to movement, one might expect the structure of the poem as a whole to suffer. On the contrary, Valéry ensures, through the restricted vocabulary, the coherence of the poem's overall form. The repetition of key words or sounds referring back to the sonnet, enforces the bond between the two movements. Valéry similarly creates a unit of the development's stanzas through repetition. As words and sounds in one stanza -- "or," "sombre," and "espace," (etc.) -- signal us to recall other such soundings, Valéry establishes a relationship between what seemed, at first, ambiguously related stanzas. The network of these echoes grows larger and more complex as the stanzas progress, creating the distinct unit or movement that we see as the development of the poem.

Upon a first reading, the stanzas of the development do not progress according to any particular scheme; their varying forms and shifts in voicing undercut any semblance of order. However, with a closer look at the way that Valéry alternates the voices, a pattern emerges similar to the structure of a sonata's second movement or development. Very broadly, a sonata's development proceeds in the following manner: First,

the composer reintroduces the exposition's principal melodies (or themes), elaborating on them more fully. As the development continues, he carries each of these melodies to a peak until, towards the movement's close, he draws them together to a climax.

Valéry generates the movement of his development in a similar manner; the stanzas can be seen to compose four groups. Stanzas five through seven generally correspond to the composer's re-introduction of the piece's melodies. Through the voice of the omniscient narrator, Valéry re-presents the principal figures of the poem, elaborating on the dynamic between them. Here we see the subtleties of the evening's approach and the viewer's changing (and complex) responses to it. In stanzas eight to eleven, Valéry draws the theme of the viewer's relationship to the larger universe to a peak. The poem acquires a dramatic dimension as the viewer narrates his own crisis; from his confusion at the vast beauty about him to the precarious triumph he finds in his own imaginative vision. With the appearance of night's first cloud, the viewer's voice recedes from the poem and in stanzas twelve through fourteen, Valéry draws the theme of the sky's movement to a peak. Here the stanzas have a clearer relationship to one another than at any other point in the poem; with each successive stanza, the

clouds assume greater force until dusk finally succumbs to night. The viewer's voice surges back into the poem in stanza fifteen, and in the last two stanzas, Valéry draws the dynamic between the viewer and the evening to a climax. The viewer dramatically attempts to catch hold of the images of his vision at the same time as the last rose color dips below the horizon.

As we turn to take a closer look at the development of "Profusion du soir," we must note that our analysis will differ somewhat from that of the sonnet. To familiarize the reader with the musical language and to illustrate the correspondence between sound and meaning, we focused our analysis of the sonnet on how the sounds of Valéry's language reveal the subject of the poem. While we must keep in mind Valéry's continuous attention to the musical detail of the poem in its development, we will focus our analysis of the next twelve stanzas on the poem's broader musical strokes. We will concentrate on how Valéry elaborates on the sonnet and, more particularly, on how he generates the movement of the poem. Guiding our analysis is one of Valéry's many definitions of his poetic aims -- "Trouver les modulations bonnes pour unir dans le même ouvrage les différentes activités - styles - moments d'un esprit" -- for, in the way he structures the development of "Profusion du soir" -- in the passage from one stanza to the

next -- he accomplishes this formidable poetic objective. (20)

Ô soir, tu viens épandre un délice tranquille,  
 Horizon des sommeils, stupeur des coeurs pieux,  
 Persuasive approche, insidieux reptile,  
 Et rose que respire un mortel immobile  
 Dont l'oeil doré s'engage aux promesses des cieus.

\*

Sur tes ardents autels son regard favorable  
 Brûle, l'âme distraite, un passé précieux.  
 Il adore dans l'or qui se rend adorable  
 Bâtir d'une vapeur un temple mémorable,  
 Suspendre au sombre éther son risque et son recif,  
 Et vole, ivre des feux d'un triomphe passif,  
 Sur l'abîme aux ponts d'or rejoindre la Fortune;  
 Tandis qu'aux bords lointains du Théâtre pensif,  
 Sous un masque léger glisse la mince lune...

\*

...Ce vin bu, l'homme bâille, et brise le flacon.  
 Aux merveilles du vide il garde une rancune;  
 Mais le charme du soir fume sur le balcon  
 Une confusion de femme et de flocon... (V - VII)

In the first few stanzas of the development of "Profusion du soir," Valéry re-presents the omniscient narrator's voice and the principal poetic figures -- evening and viewer. Though the scene -- the viewer gazing upon the skies -- strikes a resonant chord recalling the sonnet, in the above stanzas Valéry, like our metaphorical composer, lingers over his presentation of both the evening light and viewer. In contrast to the sun's fast appearance and withdrawal in the sonnet, here we see the evening's multiform approach and how its light affects the skyscape. Though the viewer looks into the setting sun and finds there, as he does in the sonnet, a reflection of

his own possibilities, he does not so effortlessly absorb the sun's power. Rather, here we witness the uneven process behind his creative transformation: He stands in awe of evening's beauty at one moment, soars in imaginative flight at the next and, though still attracted to the evening's elusive images, he then withdraws, overcome with weariness.

The first words of stanza five -- "Ô soir" -- immediately focus our attention on the same evening moment of the sonnet; however, here Valéry presents not only the light of the sky as it meets the viewer's eye, but he offers us a moving portrait of the evening's approach and the viewer's stunned response. Throughout the stanza, Valéry presents evening and viewer by juxtaposing evening's rapid movement and its quieting effect. As the "Horizon des sommeils," the evening is the dividing line between wakefulness and sleep. Those who watch are seduced by its "délice tranquille"; yet, the evening is not marked by a corresponding tranquillity. As the image of the dusk as serpent -- "insidieux reptile" -- suggests, the evening is ever-moving and powerful.

Valéry adheres to a rhythm of alexandrines in stanza five, yet the lines do not progress in an even manner. In the way that he apposes the images and varies the pauses, he draws us into the evening's movement and its paradoxically calming

effect. In line one, for example, once the omniscient narrator calls to evening, we meet a pause and in the uninterrupted flow of the line -- "tu viens épandre un délice tranquille," -- together with the repeated vowel sounds, Valéry invites us to linger in its "délice tranquille." By breaking lines two and three into even parts, Valéry breaks the flow of the lines, slowing their pace, thereby urging us to pause and reflect upon the apposed images. The long vowels that mark these lines -- "Horizon," "sommeils," "stupeur," "coeur," "persuasive," "approche," -- and the internal rhyme and assonance that unite them -- "stupeur," "coeurs," "pieux," "insidieux" -- also contribute to their slower pace, further urging us to note the contrast between evening's unrelenting movement and its quieting effect.

Valéry intensifies the interchange between evening and viewer in lines four and five -- "Et rose que respire un mortel immobile/ Dont l'oeil doré s'engage aux promesses des cieux." The figure of the rose suggests both the evening's seductive and ephemeral nature. Fragrant and visually affecting as the rose, the evening is also as temporary. The sunset's red glow may color and transform the universe, yet such a color is temporary; its reds ultimately yield to darker shades. So powerful is this rose of evening that it immobilizes the

viewer.

Though Valéry focuses on evening's movement in stanza five, the stanza's closing words do not impel a movement towards the next stanza; rather they turn our attention to the stanza's opening words. The viewer gazes at the "promesses des cieux," and as we look upon the skies, we recall the omniscient narrator's initial call to evening.

Though the voicing is the same -- we still hear the omniscient narrator's voice -- in stanza six, Valéry turns our attention away from the rapid movement of the skies to the viewer's "regard." While in the sonnet, Valéry presents the viewer's direct absorption of the external scene, here he elaborates on his process of assimilating the sun's power by subtly shifting our point of view (modulating our perspective) several times within the stanza's nine lines.

Valéry immediately focuses our attention on the viewer's posture towards the skies with the preposition "sur" and in the pauseless progression of line one -- "Sur tes ardents autels son regard favorable...". However, with the first word of line two -"Brûle," Valéry shifts our perspective from the viewer's outward posture to his inner world. In contrast to the smooth flow of the first line, the second is marked by three pauses that shift our attention from the viewer's outward "regard" to

the complexity of the inner world he brings to that pose.

Valéry stresses this inner turn by indenting line three and invites us into the very midst of the viewer's reflective state and imaginative flight in lines three through seven. So absorbed by "l'âme distraite," the viewer sees, not the darkening world about him, but rather, his own desire to transform the evening air into an image of permanence -- "Bâtir d'une vapeur un temple mémorable," -- and to soar above the earth -- "Et vole.../ Sur l'abîme aux ponts d'or rejoindre la Fortune." Valéry draws us into the viewer's reflective state by creating a tonal or auditory portrait of the viewer's state in lines three and four. He looks into the evening and finds only an image of himself -- "Il adore dans l'or qui se rend adorable." "Or," repeated three times in one line, at once refers to the viewer's way of seeing, the object of his vision, and to what he finds there. With such echoing, sky and viewer become indistinguishable and as the last word of the line -- "adorable" -- recalls the first -- "Il adore" -- Valéry creates a circular reflection of the line itself.

We might recall here Valéry's belief that the frequency with which poets use particular words in a poem indicates their resonance in the work. (21) Rather than signifying one meaning, the repetitions of "or" urge us to examine each sounding in

relation to previous soundings. "Or" then, evokes multiple associations; its sound simultaneously calls to mind the sun's color and power, the light reflected in the watchful eye, the creative aim of the contemplative process, and the steps of his creative journey. "Or" does not represent any one of these associations more than any other; its value can no more be fixed than the sonority of a musical note.

Valéry again modulates our perspective in the last two lines of the stanza -- "Tandis qu'aux bords lointains du Théâtre pensif,/ Sous un masque léger glisse la mince lune..." A marked pause begins line eight that signals the shift in point of view and in lines eight and nine, the omniscient narrator turns our attention to the progression of evening. While in his imaginative life, the viewer bridges the gap between himself and the larger universe ( "Suspendre au sombre ether son risque et son recif,/Et vole ... Sur l'abîme aux ponts d'or..."), the moon's appearance reminds us of the distance that separates him from the heavens. Valéry expresses the subtlety of the moon's approach in the sound pattern of the stanza's last lines. The repetitions of long "i" unite the lines -- "Tandis," "pensif," "glisse," -- and the repetitions of soft "m" and "l" sounds -- "masque léger glisse la mince lune" -- approximate the moon's silent appearance. The line is

framed by long "u" sounds -- "Sous," "lune,"-- and the stanza ends with a circular closure.

Valéry accentuates the modulations within the stanza -- from the viewer's initial outward gaze to his inward turn, and from his inner world to the world outside -- by closing the stanza with an ellipsis. The stanza culminates neither with the viewer's flight nor with the moon's appearance; their movement is as ongoing as the poem itself.

As uplifting as the viewer's imaginative flight is, he cannot sustain his vision and in stanza seven, he falls abruptly to earth. Valéry thus once more adjusts our perspective in the movement from stanza six to seven; from the soaring heights of the viewer's imagination to his very real place in the physical world.

Consistent with his method throughout the poem, Valéry demonstrates the viewer's state of mind (in this instance, his fall) in the rhythm and sound structure of each stanza rather than through direct description or narration. While the ellipsis that opens stanza seven suggests ongoing or continuous movement and the sound structure of the stanza's first line echoes that of the previous stanza -- "Ce vin bu" closely follows upon "la mince lune" -- the sharp change in the overall sound pattern and rhythm in the first line of the stanza --

"...Ce vin bu, l'homme bâille, et brise le flacon." --

indicates the viewer's shift in mood. Each successive "b" sound -- "bu," "bâille," "brise" -- and each pause -- there are three in this first line -- seems to pull the viewer, as if by jolts, closer to the ground over which he flies in the previous stanza. Valéry thus urges us to see the human, physical side of his viewer who, up to this point in the poem is characterized only by the keenness of his vision -- "l'oeil contemplateur," (1,2) "l'oeil nu," (4,1) "l'oeil doré," (5,5) "regard favorable." (6,1)

Valéry reminds us of the viewer's humanity in stanza seven; however, his position is not so firmly fixed. The pervasive "charme du soir" still offers him images that promise to lift him beyond his physical position. Valéry marks a shift in perspective -- from the viewer's fall to earth to his desire for the charms of evening -- with a semi-colon, and in lines three and four Valéry presents the evening's seductive and elusive images -- "Mais le charme du soir fume sur le balcon/ Une confusion de femme et de flocon..." Valéry underlines the subtlety of the viewer's shifts in mood, from bitterness to enchantment, from hope to despair in the close end rhymes of the stanza -- "flacon," "rancune," "balcon," "flocon." In the near internal rhyme -- "fume/femme" he likewise draws our

particular attention to the evening's elusive nature; the change in only one vowel sound (u-e) expresses in sound the visual change from smoke to the goddess-like form. Yet, neither form, wreath of smoke nor woman becomes entirely discernable in stanza seven. Rather, Valéry frames the stanza with an ellipsis, again stressing the ongoing and unresolved nature of both the viewer's contemplative process and the progression of evening.

-Ô Conseil!... Station solennelle!... Balance  
 D'un doigt doré pesant les motifs du silence!  
 Ô sagesse sensible entre les dieux ardents!  
 -De l'espace trop beau, préserve-moi balustre!  
 Là, m'appelle la mer!... Là, se penche l'illustre  
 Vénus Vertigineuse avec ses bras fondants!

\*

Mon oeil, quoiqu'il s'attache au sort souple des ondes,  
 Et boive comme en songe à l'éternel verseau,  
 Garde une chambre fixe et capable des mondes;  
 Et ma cupidité des surprises profondes  
 Voit à peine au travers du transparent berceau  
 Cette femme d'écume et d'algue et d'or que roule  
 Sur le sable et le sel la meule de la houle.

\*

Pourtant je place aux cieus les ébats d'un esprit;  
 Je vois dans leurs vapeurs des terres inconnues,  
 Des déesses de fleurs feindre d'être des nues,  
 Des puissances d'orage d'errer à demi nues,  
 Et sur les roches d'air du soir qui s'assombrit,  
 Telle divinité s'accoude. Un ange nage.  
 Il restaure l'espace à chaque tour de rein.  
 Moi, qui jette ici-bas l'ombre d'un personnage,  
 Toutefois délié dans le plein souverain,  
 Je me sens qui me trempe, et pur qui me dédaigne!  
 Vivant au sein futur le souvenir marin,  
 Tout le corps de mon choix dans mes regards se baigne!

\*

Une crête écumeuse, énorme et colorée  
 Barre, puissamment pure, et plisse le parvis.

Roule jusqu'à mon coeur la distance dorée,  
 Vague!... Croulants soleils aux horizons ravis,  
 Tu n'iras pas plus loin que la ligne ignorée  
 Qui divise les dieux des ombres ou je vis. (VIII - XI)

With stanza eight comes an abrupt change in perspective as the viewer becomes the speaker. As his excited tones burst into the poem, Valéry dramatically ushers us into the viewer's process of vision. Such a shift in voicing draws our attention to the viewer's way of seeing with a sense of urgency as yet unencountered in the poem. In marked contrast to the omniscient viewpoint of earlier stanzas, in stanzas eight through eleven, Valéry draws us into the succession of moments as they move from one to the next: from the viewer's emotional confusion (eight) to his turning inward to analyze his own process of vision (nine). When, in stanza ten, the viewer draws us into the very substance of his imaginative vision and, in stanza eleven, once again reminds us of the power of the natural world within which that vision occurs, Valéry draws one of the essential themes of the poem -- the viewer's relationship to the larger universe -- to a peak or crescendo.

The viewer's first exclamation -- "Ô Conseil!" -- strikingly echoes the first words of the poem as a whole -- "Du Soleil...". By means of such an echo, Valéry signals the sharp shift in voicing and suggests another beginning with stanza eight, for though the the viewer traces the same transformative

process traced in earlier stanzas in this and the next few stanzas, it is the first time we listen to him narrate his own crisis.

The viewer is so overcome by the vastness of evening that all he can do is to cry out for guidance. Valéry conveys the depth of the viewer's feeling in the way he builds the stanza with a series of exclamations, pauses and silences, thus heightening our awareness of his voice. As if to approximate the viewer's breathlessness, Valéry punctuates the first line with three pauses and three exclamation points -- "Ô Conseil!...Station solonelle!...Balance". In the rapid flow of lines two and three (broken by one exclamation point) in which the viewer desperately calls out for balance or direction -- "Balance/ D'un doigt doré..." and tries to summon up his whole sensibility -- "Ô sagesse sensible " -- to help him, Valéry further emphasizes the uncontrolled nature of the viewer's emotion as he confronts the vastness of external space.

If in his initial outcries the viewer sets forth his confusion, in each successive line his confusion intensifies. The viewer pauses in line three and then cries out, in what is probably the most sustained impassioned line in the poem thus far, for physical balance -- "De l'espace trop beau,

préserve-moi, balustre!" Valéry's use of the first person in this line is particularly powerful, as the viewer refers to himself at the very moment that he feels his identity most threatened.

That the viewer finds himself caught between images that the evening offers him is clear in the way he turns at once toward the direction of the sea and then toward an image of Venus. In the last two echoing exclamations -- "Là, m'appelle la mer...Là se penche l'illustre Vénus..." -- Valéry creates in sound a sense of the viewer's visual confusion, further drawing the reader into his impassioned state, and closes the stanza on the very same heightened note on which it began.

Valéry voices stanza nine with the viewer; however, in the move from stanza eight to stanza nine, his voice markedly changes from exclamation to calm reflection. In contrast to the high-pitched tones with which the viewer confronts the beauty of the universe in stanza eight, in stanza nine he presents with perfect self-possession his manner of vision. By so shifting the viewer's tone, Valéry prompts us, as readers, to question the viewer's change in state: How has desperation yielded to contemplation? What is the relationship between his exclamations and his reason? More important than the answers to these questions, Valéry urges us, through such a tonal

change to examine the change in the viewer's vision. In stanza eight, his frantic tones express his inability to focus either on himself or on the world about him. His eye jumps, as his voice does, from image to image. Here, by contrast, his more reasoning tone reveals a marked change in view. No longer focused exclusively on the exterior world -- on the "sort souple des ondes" -- to clarify his relationship to the greater universe, the viewer's inner eye allows him to see the world about him in relation to the world within himself -- the "sort souple des ondes" in relation to the infinite possibilities of his own "chambre fixe."

Critics of "Profusion du soir" have taken the poem's more difficult transitions -- such as we see in the movement from stanza eight to stanza nine -- as major faults in its organization. (22) However, to see such shifts in voicing and perspective as symptomatic of a "weak inner organization" is to overlook the poem's essentially musical structure. For, the shift in perspective and mood that we see here distinctly parallels and further develops a similar shift both in the sonnet and in the first few stanzas of the development of "Profusion du soir." In the sonnet, as soon as the light meets the viewer's eye, the omniscient narrator turns his attention away from the sun to his own inner world. The omniscient

narrator again details such a shift in perspective in stanzas five and six: He first presents the viewer's stunned glance at evening and then details the viewer's turn inward. The transition, then, that we see in the above stanzas -- from the viewer's excited exclamations to the calmer tones in which he puts forth his way of seeing -- is further evidence of the poem's musical structure.

In keeping with this musical development, the viewer adds more depth and scope to this movement. He becomes so increasingly absorbed in his inner world in stanza nine, that he can hardly see the world external to himself. The language in this stanza consequently reflects or expresses such an ambiguous line between the viewer's inner world and the external world. For example, while the swift pace of lines four through seven at first suggests the viewer's easy apprehension of the world about him -- "Et ma cupidité des surprises profondes/ Voit à peine au travers du transparent berceau..." -- the language undercuts such a suggestion. The viewer does not state what he actually sees, but rather what his "cupidité," his inner desire, sees. The viewer's desire for "surprises profondes" similarly points to the subtle distinction to be made between the inner and outer worlds: "surprises profondes" simultaneously points to a precise moment

-- "surprises" as the immediacy of a sudden recognition -- and its inner sources, "profondes." Yet, it is the melodious last couplet where Valéry expresses how transformed the viewer's vision is by his own "chambre fixe." So focused on his inner world, he can hardly discern Venus' figure; he can only make out her undulating form at one moment visible, and at the next as indistinguishable as the movement of the waves: "Cette femme d'écume et d'algue et d'or que roule/ Sur le sable et le sel la meule de la houle."

We can see the musical movement once more and powerfully in the transition from stanza nine to ten. In both the sonnet and development (stanza six), once he internalizes his vision of the sun, the viewer recognizes his own creative ambitions. Valéry follows exactly such a process in these two stanzas: After he turns inward and analyzes his way of seeing, the viewer then shows us precisely what he sees. While in the earlier parts of the poem, Valéry conveys the viewer's creative goals from the distanced perspective of the omniscient narrator (in the sonnet we watch him "joue avec les feux de l'antique inventeur"; in stanza six, we learn of his aim "Bâtir d'une vapeur un temple mémorable"), as we listen to the viewer's sustained calm tones in stanza ten, we not only learn of these aims, but we follow him into the very process of creation. As

we listen to his voice, we see how he transforms the evening air into the figures and shapes of his own inner eye.

Valéry urges us to pay particularly close attention to the viewer's voice in stanza ten, and draws one of the poem's central themes -- the viewer's relationship to the larger universe -- to a peak in several ways. The first is in the way he handles the transition from stanza nine to stanza ten. It is striking in this poem in which Valéry generally uses transitions to undercut a fluid movement, to thwart our expectations of a chronological or thematic narrative, to note the strong tonal and thematic continuity in the movement from stanza nine to stanza ten. The viewer speaks as if there were no break between stanzas, opening the stanza with a conjunction that underlines this continuity: "Pourtant je place aux cieux les ébats d'un esprit." By means of such a smooth transition, Valéry thus draws his readers more deeply into the viewer's mind, his way of seeing, and urges us to see and feel what he speaks.

The viewer himself asserts in line one (stanza ten) the imaginative nature of what he sees. He sees, not the darkening skies but the shapes of his own mind in the heavens -- "...je place au cieux les ébats d'un esprit." In lines two through seven, he shows us this imaginative skyscape; the skies are not

filled with tangible flowers and storms, but with the viewer's imaginative vision -- "Des déesses de fleurs d'êtres des nues," and partly visible "puissances d'orages." The dimming light presents to his mind's eye the figure of a pensive god -- "Telle divinité s'accoude " -- and an angel endowed with powers of regeneration. As this angel swims, "Il restaure l'espace à chaque tour de rein."

Valéry emphasizes the imaginative nature of what the viewer sees and urges us to linger in a rather timeless atmosphere in the verbal and rhythmic structure of these lines. To highlight the continuous movement of his imaginative figures Valéry uses infinitives -- "Des déesses de fleurs feindre..."; "Des puissances d'orage errer...". Even though the viewer reminds us of evening's progression -- "Et sur les roches d'air du soir qui s'assombrit" -- and uses the present tense to describe both the evening's and the divinities' movements in lines five through seven ("qui s'assombrit," "Telle divinité s'accoude"; "Un ange nage," "Il restaure l'espace"), each verb rather than menacing the vision, suggests its continuity. The divinity does not move forward in time, but rather rests self-contentedly -- "Telle divinité s'accoude." The angel swims -- "Un ange nage" -- yet not to a specific end; with each stroke, rather, he regains the passing moments -- "Il restaure

l'espace à chaque tour de rein." The interrupted movement of line six also thwarts any expectation of forward movement. The stop midway through the line: "Telle divinité s'accoude. Un ange nage." -- splits the line, apposes the images and creates a self-enclosed unit of each one.

When the speaker, in line eight, suddenly shifts his view from the skies to the shadow his figure casts -- "Moi, qui jette ici-bas l'ombre d'un personnage," it seems, for a moment, that the timeless quality of the stanza might be interrupted. However, he turns his eye toward the ground only to elaborate on the sense of wholeness with the universe that his vision has prompted. Valéry stresses the viewer's feeling of oneness with the universe and enforces the timelessness of stanza ten as a whole in the verbal progression and the sound pattern of the stanza's last few lines:

Je me sens qui me trempe et pur qui me dédaigne!  
 Vivant au sein futur le souvenir marin,  
 Tout le corps de mon choix dans mes regards se baigne!  
 (X, 10-12)

These lines are marked by internal rhyme and assonance that create a self-enclosed quality. The series of reflexive verbs also contributes to this circularity: There are three in the stanza's last three lines -- "Je me sens," "me dédaigne," "se baigne." With the nearly static final verb, "se baigne," Valéry

closes on such a reflexive note and conveys the comfort of the viewer's imaginative vision and its momentary triumph over time.

We have insisted on focusing on the development's broader musical strokes -- on its relationship to the sonnet, and on how Valéry generates the movement of these stanzas (stanzas five through twelve). However, it is important to note that one of the most important ways that Valéry signals the centrality of stanza ten, one of the principal ways he draws its theme to a peak, is through the abundant echoes. Nearly every word and sound in this stanza recalls one previously sounded. Among the most notable are: "cieux," "vapeurs," "nues," "air du soir," "ange," "l'espace," "l'ombre," "plein souverain," "pur," "regard." We can see how such echoes contribute to the thematic climax of this stanza by taking a brief look at one of the most striking echoes in this stanza (and of the poem). With the sounding of "l'espace" in line seven -- "Il restaure l'espace à chaque tour de rein" -- Valéry prompts us to recall the viewer's outcry in stanza seven -- "-De l'espace trop beau, préserve-moi balustre." He urges us, by means of such an echo to note the change that has transpired in the movement from the earlier stanza to the later one -- a change from fear to comfort, from the viewer's yearning to

articulate his relation to the world about him to his discovery of the angel of his own vision.

That Valéry is more concerned with the transformative principles that comprise both the viewer's experience of evening and the evening itself than he is with proclaiming a permanence for the viewer's vision is evident in the transition from stanza ten to stanza eleven. The viewer still speaks in the latter stanza; however, his attention turns away from the play of his own mind and toward evening's intrusive images.

Valéry creates in sound a sense of the evening's faster approach and of the speaker's shift in mood. The insistent "é" sounds and repeated "b" and "p" that resound through the first lines sharply turn our attention toward the approaching clouds -- "Une crête écumeuse, énorme et colorée/ Barre, puissamment pure, et plisse le parvis." Several striking echoes also foster this shift in mood and urge us to note the viewer's sudden recognition of time's passage. The viewer's exclamation in line four --"Vague!" -- recalls the omniscient narrator's call to the viewer in the sonnet -- "Regard!". In contrast, however, to the opening call which turns the viewer's attention to the still powerful rays of the sun, here the viewer cries out to the waves of evening that reduce that sun to the now "...Croulants soleils aux horizons ravis."

Most remarkable in the movement from stanza ten to eleven is the transformation in the viewer's voice. In contrast to the reflective (and reflexive) tones that mark his language in the previous stanza, in stanza eleven the evening is so overwhelming that his voice sounds as weakened as the light of the "croulants soleils." The viewer underscores the physical power of evening when he, rather weakly, addresses the wave in the stanza's closing lines: "Tu n'iras pas plus loin que la ligne ignorée/ Qui divise les dieux des ombres ou je vis" -- and dramatically points to the unbridgeable distance that separates him from the heavens.

Une volute lente et longue d'une lieue  
 Semant les charmes lourds de sa blanche torpeur  
 Ou se joue une joie, une soif d'être bleue,  
 Tire le noir navire épuisé de vapeur...

\*

Mais pesants et neigeux les monts du crépuscule,  
 Les nuages trop pleins et leurs seins copieux,  
 Toute la majesté de l'Olympe recule  
 Car voici le signal, voici l'or des adieux,  
 Et l'espace a humé la barque miniscule...

\*

Lourds frontons du sommeil toujours inachevés,  
 Rideaux bizarrement d'un rubis relevés  
 Pour le mauvais regard d'une sombre planète,  
 Les temps sont accomplis, les désirs se sont tus,  
 Et dans la bouche d'or, bâillements combattus,  
 S'écartèlent les mots que charmait le poète...  
 Les temps sont accomplis, les désirs se sont tus. (XII-XIV)

However boldly the viewer cries out to control evening's wave in the last lines of stanza eleven, he can halt neither its motion nor its power. Valéry emphasizes both the viewer's

powerlessness and dusk's inevitable descent into night by modulating our perspective in the above stanzas: The viewer's voice disappears from the poem and the omniscient narrator turns his attention almost exclusively to the skies.

We have discussed earlier that, rather than focusing on one central theme or idea in "Profusion du soir," Valéry primarily concerns himself with the simultaneous movement of the viewer's mind and evening. Valéry stresses this concern in the way he counterpoints the viewer's narration with the evening's rapid advance. If in stanzas eight through eleven, the viewer pulls us into his own process of mind, in stanzas twelve through fourteen, the omniscient narrator directs our eye to the movement of the skies. And, as the dusk clouds transform themselves into a night skyscape, Valéry draws the second principal theme of the poem -- that of the sky's movement -- to a crescendo.

Although Valéry shifts the voicing here, he softens or mutes this modulation in the way his first words echo those of the previous stanza. The omniscient narrator directs our eye to the same advancing clouds -- "Une volute lente et longue d'une lieue" -- that interrupted the viewer's meditation in the previous stanza -- "Une crête écumeuse...". Such visual echoing draws our attention to the gathering momentum of the

evening clouds; the single crested cloud -- "Une crête..."-- has now grown into the rolling motion of the sky -- "Une volute" -- that draws everything into its midst.

Characteristically, Valéry draws our attention to and stresses the force of the late evening sky in the pace and sound pattern of the stanza's four lines. The first two lines progress without a pause and the repeated "m" and "l" sounds and long vowels -- "Une volute lente et longue d'une lieue/ Semant les charmes lourds de sa blanche torpeur..." -- suggest the steady motion of the clouds as well as their heavy substance. The stanza's close end rhymes -- "lieue," "torpeur," "bleue," "vapeur," -- also contribute to our sense of a gathering momentum.

Valéry suggests a lightening of this heavy motion, even a respite from the sky's relentless movement, in the softer sound pattern and in the images of line three -- "Où se joue une joie, une soif d'être bleue,..."; the mournful long sounds give way to gentler "j's," and the image of a blue sky conveys a hope, however fleeting, for daylight. However, the sounding of the delayed verb "Tire" in line four shatters any such hope. The darkening sky then pulls everything-- even the viewer, now metaphorically the "noir navire" -- into its "blanche torpeur."

Valéry underlines the speed of oncoming night in the rapid

and pauseless pace of the final line -- "Tire le noir navire épuisé de vapeur" and powerfully points to the viewer's transformation in the final echo of stanza twelve. Once so full of ambition -- in stanza six, the viewer aims "Bâtir d'une vapeur un temple mémorable" -- the viewer is now so overcome by the force of the natural world that such ambition and hope is utterly exhausted; he is "épuisé de vapeur."

Valéry highlights the ongoing movement of the skies in the transition from stanza twelve to thirteen. By closing stanza twelve with an ellipsis, he suggests the evening's ceaseless progression and by opening stanza thirteen with a conjunction -- "Mais pesants et neigues les monts du crépuscule,..." - he creates a strong sense of continuity. The assonant rhyme schemes of these two stanzas further underline their bond and the poem quickly moves, as do the clouds, to another peak or crescendo.

If in stanza twelve, the omniscient narrator points to the clouds' increasing momentum, in the passage to the next stanza or they have reached their fullest point; the clouds now stand as an immovable force. Valéry conveys a sense of stasis both in the fullness of his images as well as in the pace of his lines. In contrast to the rapid movement of the advancing clouds in the previous stanza, the darker evening clouds are so

heavy that they hardly move. With each successive image Valéry stresses their immobility: Now "monts du crepuscules," they are heavy and satiate -- "pesants," "trop pleins," "seins copieux." Each of the end-stopped lines of the stanza also slows their advance. Valéry underscores their force -- and, by extension, the ultimate power of the natural world in the stanza's third line -- "Toute la majesté de l'Olympe recule,...". With the absolute "Toute" and another delayed verb -- "recule" -- Valéry stresses the power of these evening clouds; their force is so all-encompassing that they not only overpower the viewer's vision and voice, but they command the very structure of the heavens.

In two of the most remarkable echoes of the poem, Valéry draws the theme of the sky's movement to its highest point. While the specific language of line four -- "Car voici le signal, voici l'or des adieux" -- does not refer back to stanza eight, both the structure of the lines and the way in which the omniscient narrator points to a specific place and time sharply recalls, even responds to, the earlier stanza. While in stanza eight the viewer desperately points outward and attempts to locate or fix the image of what he sees (and imagines) -- "Là, m'appelle la mer!...Là, se penche l'illustre Vénus...", here the omniscient narrator, in a strikingly more subdued tone

points to the very moment and place that such vision becomes impossible -- "Car voici le signal, voici l'or des adieux."

The viewer, who in stanza eight, cries out for protection from "l'espace trop beaux," and who, only a few stanzas later, basks in his vision of an angel "qui restaure l'espace,..." is finally, in stanza thirteen, overcome -- "Et l'espace a humé la barque miniscule." It is thus through such structural and tonal echoes that Valéry presents the fullest moment of dusk and the exact instant of its transformation into night.

Had Valéry intended to close "Profusion du soir" on a note of finality, he might have ended the poem with stanza thirteen -- with the victory of night over day and the triumph of time over the viewer's imaginative vision. Such, however, is not the case. Rather, in keeping with the musical development of the poem, once he has drawn the movement of the skies to a peak, he once again asserts the simultaneity of the viewer's process and the sky's changing form.

Valéry juxtaposes the accomplishment of evening with the viewer's state throughout stanza fourteen. Complementing evening's "charmes lourds" are the viewer's "lourds frontons du sommeils toujours inachevés." As heavy as "les nuages trop pleins," the viewer can hardly lift his eyelids to see the enveloping darkness. Yet, if the viewer is overcome by

fatigue, so, too, is the universe; so advanced is the evening that the little light there is reveals only a "sombre planète."

Valéry conveys a tension between closure and a sense of incompleteness in this stanza. The viewer's eyes are heavy yet his sleep is "toujours inachevés,..."; though evening has turned to night, there is yet enough light to reveal "une sombre planète,..." The mournful tones -- long round vowels and repetitions of "m," "r," "l" resound through these lines -- also contribute to the curious tension between the final and the incomplete. Valéry masterfully stresses this tension in the structure of the last four lines: While each refrain conveys the sense of finality -- "Les temps sont accomplis, les désirs se sont tus," -- the portrait of the viewer, now referred to as poet for the first time, undercuts this finality -- "Et dans la bouche d'or, bâillements combattus,/ S'écarteraient les mots que charmaient le poète...".

Perhaps more than any other stanza so far, stanza fourteen ends with a sense of completion; Valéry's last refrain certainly does not suggest any ambiguity. His portrait of the viewer/poet, however, framed by this refrain, adds a strong note of ambiguity to this finality, and even urges us to question the gloomy note on which the stanza ends. Valéry's use of the present tense -- "S'écarteraient les mots -- , the

imperfect -- "que charmait" -- and the ellipsis that closes the penultimate line all suggest, despite time's passage and the viewer's inability to see, that the poet's words, however fragmentary, have an independent existence.

Adieu, Adieu!... Vers vous, ô mes belles images,  
 Mes bras tendent toujours l'insatiable port!  
 Venez, éffarouchés, hérissant vos plumages,  
 Voiliers aventureux que talonne la mort!  
 Hâtez-vous, hâtez vous!... La nuit presse!... Tantale  
 Va périr! Et la joie éphémère des cieux!  
 Une rose naguère aux ténèbres fatale,  
 Une toute dernière rose occidentale  
 Pâlit affreusement sur le soir spacieux...  
 Je ne vois plus frémir au mât du belvédère  
 Ivre de brise un sylphe aux couleurs de drapeau,  
 Et ce grand port n'est qu'un noir débarcadère  
 Couru du vent glacé que sent venir ma peau!

Fermez-vous! Fermez-vous! Fenêtres offensées!  
 Grands yeux qui redoutez la véritable nuit!  
 Et toi, de ces hauteurs d'astres ensemencées,  
 Accepte, fécondé de mystère et d'ennui,  
 Une maternité muette de pensées... (XV - XVI)

The omniscient narrator's mournful tones convey a sense of finality in the closing lines of stanza fourteen; however, Valéry sharply modulates the poem in the next stanza, and undercuts any such finality. The viewer's voice resurges into the poem and dramatically thrusts us back into the dusk's last moments; as he intones, we watch the disillusion of the images of his vision and the remaining light vanish.

As we approach the last stanzas of "Profusion du soir," we cannot help but be struck by some crucial observations and

questions concerning Valéry's rather abrupt transition and the form of the above lines. Why does Valéry choose to modulate the poem in stanza fifteen when, by the close of the previous stanza, he has so successfully traced the essential transformations of the poem (the viewer's transformation from a contemplative to a creative state and dusk's transformation to night)? Is this another example of the poem's faulty, unclear structure or does Valéry have a reason for so radically shifting perspective?

A first look at the form and voicing of the last stanzas provokes even more questions. We have noted earlier the irregular form of the poem as a whole -- the autonomous structure of the stanzas and their variations in voicing, rhythm and length. Yet, the above stanzas are, perhaps, the most irregular of all. While each previous stanza concerns itself with one aspect, one piece of evening's transformation, in stanzas fifteen and sixteen the viewer traces in eighteen lines the entire transformation from dusk to nightfall and from vision to obscurity. In striking contrast to the earlier stanzas which maintain consistency in tone and voice (within each individual stanza), stanzas fifteen and sixteen are consistent neither in tone nor voice. In stanza fifteen, the viewer's voice is marked by almost disarming shifts in tone;

his voice is at one moment exclamatory, at the next, subdued, and at the close of stanza fifteen, almost resigned. Sharp tonal shifts also characterize the poem's final stanza but, even more notable is a possible shift in voicing in the stanza. We hear the viewer's voice in its first two lines, yet the speaker of the last three lines is mysterious. Again, questions persist: Why, after having so fully elaborated on the poem's main voices and themes, after having drawn the principal movements and strains of the poem to peaks, does Valéry close with such a strikingly different form?

However abrupt the transition to these final stanzas and their irregular form and voicing, all of these formal aspects are brilliantly consistent with Valéry's musical structure in "Profusion du soir." We have discussed earlier the broad correspondence of Valéry's development in the poem to a sonata's development. After having drawn the principal themes of a sonata to a peak, the composer then draws these together to a climax towards the close of his movement. So it is with Valéry's last two stanzas: In stanzas eight through eleven, and in stanzas twelve through fourteen, Valéry has drawn his major themes to a peak. When in the transition from stanza fourteen to fifteen, Valéry modulates the poem and voices its final stanzas with the viewer, he heightens the dramatic moment

of the poem, demanding our attention to this climactic moment -- the moment that the viewer reaches out towards evening's images and the last color fades from the sky. Valéry masterfully draws these themes together in the seemingly irregular form and voicing of the last stanzas: As the viewer traces the movement in time from his last glimpses of dusk to nightfall, as we listen to his voice intone from desperation, to resignation and finally to acceptance, Valéry prompts us to review, to recall the viewer's many moods and the many evening moments he has traced throughout the poem's development.

In the first six lines of the penultimate stanza, Valéry dramatically focuses our attention both on the viewer's frantic state and on the last moments of evening with a sense of urgency. Only in stanza eight when the viewer's voice enters the poem does he exclaim with such anguish; yet, as he attempts to catch hold of evening's rapidly disappearing images here, his tones are ever-more heightened. Valéry conveys both the viewer's charged emotional state and a sense of the immanent darkness in the viewer's exclamatory tones -- there are seven exclamations in the first six lines -- and in the uneven rhythm of the lines. Valéry alternates lines with choppy rhythms -- lines one, three, five and six are full of irregular pauses -- with those that hurtle towards their close. The viewer's

charged state and the enveloping darkness are nowhere more dramatically expressed as in lines five and six: As night presses on, as the viewer stands on the threshold of the vast night, he can focus neither on his "belles images" nor on the ship's sails; rather his eyes leap, as does his voice, from the ship -- "Hâtez-vous, hâtez-vous..." to the night -- "La nuit presse!..." -- to the ship's (and his own) immanent destruction-- "Tantale/Va périr," -- and to the skies -- "Et la joie éphémère des cieux."

The viewer does not sustain this fevered pitch throughout the stanza; rather, in line six, as the viewer turns to the sky, its light once more, and finally, arrests his attention. In among the most visually evocative lines of the poem Valéry, then, offers us a final portrait of evening's last moment -- "Une rose naguère aux ténèbres fatale,/ Une toute dernière rose occidentale/ Pâlit affreusement sur le soir spacieux." The repetitions that ring through these lines, and the internal rhyme and assonance that mark them seem to extend, to prolong this last moment before nightfall.

Valéry prolongs evening's last moment only to further highlight its transformation to night; the viewer's voice again shifts tone in the stanza's last three lines. No longer frantic, the viewer speaks with more resigned tones as he

details not what he aches to see ( as in the first six lines),  
 not what he can still see (as in lines seven through nine), but  
 rather what he cannot see -- "Je ne vois plus frémir au mât du  
 belvédère/ Ivre de brise un sylphe aux couleurs de drapeau."

It is particularly striking in this poem so essentially  
 concerned with movement that the viewer not only informs us  
 that he can no longer see the images of his vision --"un sylphe  
 aux couleurs de drapeau," but that he can no longer see its  
 motion -- "Je ne vois plus frémir.... un sylphe..."

At the same time Valéry traces the temporal movement from  
 evening to night in stanza fifteen, he also urges us to review  
 the process of the whole poem. Each successive shift in tone  
 not only alerts us to the viewer's present state, of his  
 rapidly changing moods in the final moments of evening, but  
 reminds us of similar tones and moods in earlier stanzas. Each  
 word, sound, and image in this stanza simultaneously directs  
 our attention to this moment and urges us to recall similar  
 sounds and images of the poem. When the viewer, for instance,  
 cries out to his "belles images," we recall the shapes that  
 populate his "terres inconnues" in stanza ten. When he calls  
 out to "insatiable port," we hear the resonant "or" in stanzas  
 five and six. When his eyes fix on "Une toute dernière  
 rose,..." we turn back to his first glance at evening's rose

color in stanza five -- "Et rose que respire un mortel...". At the same time, then, that Valéry focuses on the time frame and draws his themes to a climax, his innumerable echoes strongly counteract such finality; rather, they impel us, much like the last bars of a sonata do, to re-enact the entire poem.

Valéry underscores the circularity and musicality of "Profusion du soir" in the final stanza of the poem. When the viewer dramatically addresses his own eyes in the first two lines -- "Fermez-vous! Fermez-vous! Fenêtres offensées!" -- Valéry, at first, seems to close the poem very clearly within the boundaries of time; from evening to night, from the omniscient narrator's initial call to the viewer in the sonnet -- "Regard"-- own call to himself to shut out "la véritable nuit." However, if the first two lines send us back to the sonnet to ponder the passage of time, its last three lines prompt us, much like the final bars of a sonata's development do, to recapitulate the sonnet. With a more mysterious voice reminiscent of the sonnet's omniscient voice, and with words, so dense with auditory and thematic echoes from the sonnet -- "hauteurs," "d'astres," "mystère," "ennui," "maternité," "pensées," -- Valéry gently urges us to turn away from night's closure and to see once again "l'Ange frais de l'oeil nu...", night's possibility, and to feel the endless moment encased in

each of time's passing moments.

## NOTES

- (1) Paul Valéry, "Ego Scriptor" Cahiers I (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Gallimard, 1973) p.314
- (2) Francis Scarfe, The Art of Paul Valéry; A Study in Dramatic Monologue (London: Heinemann, 1954) p.161
- (3) Charles Whiting, Paul Valéry (London: The Athelone Press, 1978) p.15 Whiting writes rather dismissively of "Profusion du soir" and maintains that his purpose "is not so much to examine the early poems for themselves,... as to offer some indications on how they evolve toward the poetry of "La Jeune Parque" and Charmes.
- (4) James Lawler, The Poet as Analyst: Essays on Paul Valery (University of California Press, 1974)
- (5) James Lawler, The Poet as Analyst p.77
- (6) James Lawler, The Poet as Analyst p.77
- (7) Paul Valery, "Système," Cahiers I p. 775
- (8) It is important to note that Lawler, too, discusses the musicality of "Profusion du soir." He points to Valéry's attention to its sound pattern, Valéry's care for rhythm and tonality, and the frequent repetitions in the poem. However, Lawler doesn't as I do, see Valéry's grasp of music as the key to understanding both the structure and meaning of the poem.
- (9) Paul Valéry, "Système," Cahiers I, p.793
- (10) James Lawler, The Poet as Analyst p.81
- (11) Paul Valéry, "Première leçon du cours de poétique," Oeuvres I (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Gallimard, 1973) p.1340
- (12) Paul Valéry, "Philosophie" Cahiers I, p.628-29
- (13) Paul Valéry, Oeuvres I (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Gallimard, 1973) p. 86 All quotations from "Profusion du soir" refer to this edition. (I,1) indicates stanza and line

respectively.

- (14) James Lawler, The Poet as Analyst p.79
- (15) Paul Valéry, "Poésie et pensée abstraite" Oeuvres I p.1330
- (16) Paul Valéry, "Philosophie," Cahiers I, p.628-29
- (17) Valéry discusses these ideas fully in "Poésie et pensée abstraite," "Stéphane Mallarmé," and "De la diction des vers."
- (18) See "Poésie et pensée abstraite."
- (19) The "part" of Valéry's angel that belongs to earth, that is the product of the viewer's own vision looks ahead to Wallace Stevens' "necessary angel." While Valéry's angel still shines in the heavens, Stevens' angel is more resolutely the angel of earth. A comparison between "Profusion du soir" and Stevens' "Evening without Angels" could point to the distinctions between their notions of angels. See "Evening Without Angels" in The Palm at the End of the Mind p.100
- (20) Paul Valéry, "Ego Scriptor" Cahiers I p.235
- (21) For a discussion of resonance, see especially "Léonard et les philosophes" and "Poésie et pensée abstraite."
- (22) Francis Scarfe, The Art of Paul Valéry p.161 Scarfe writes of "Profusion du soir": "The poem consists of a discontinuous series of movements frequently cut by sharp psychological transitions and changes of both inner and outer perspective." See also page 164: "The poet of "Profusion du soir" strikes me as trying to deal with a problem which he is reluctant to bring into the open, or, alternatively, as trying to write a subjectless poem, a poem which represents nothing more than the casual unconservative workings of the consciousness..."

### Chapter Three

#### Philosophical Parallels: Valéry and Wallace Stevens

He wanted his heart to stop beating and his mind to  
rest

In a permanent realization, without any wild ducks  
Or mountains that were not mountains, just to know how  
it would be,

Just to know how it would feel, released from  
destruction,  
To be a bronze man breathing under archaic lapis,

Without the oscillations of planetary pass-pass,  
Breathing his bronzen breath at the azury centre of  
time.

Stevens, from "This Solitude of Cataracts" (1)

Stevens' speaker in "This Solitude of Cataracts" looks at a river that keeps on flowing though "never the same way twice" and longs to halt its movement as well as the movement of his own heart and mind. Caught in the constant motion of his mind and the natural world, he feels that if he could only fix this fleeting world, he might finally be able to see it, to understand it in a "permanent realization."

In this poem and in many other poems and essays, Stevens seems to give voice, not only to his own, but to Valery's most persistent philosophic and poetic questions. Equipped with restless minds, how can we see and understand what we see of

our incessantly changing world? If our minds and language only mirror the disorder of the external world, how can we create poetry that expresses our minds yet also resists the flux?

When Stevens writes of the everpresent uncertainty or "destruction" that marks the mind and world he can, at times, express ideas and use language so similar to Valéry's that, were it not for their different languages and cultural contexts, we could almost hear Valéry's voice in unison.

Any discussion of the flux in Stevens' work must take into account his view of modern life. Stevens sees the mind and world as ever-moving in themselves; however, like Valéry, he comes face to face with this universal movement largely because of the way he perceives the tumultuous condition of his contemporary world. With no firm social structures and values, with no clear believed systems of belief, both poets confront a disorder, a deepening chaos. Given the state of the modern world, Valéry and Stevens cannot help but see the precarious changes that characterize our minds and the natural world.

Stevens' essays are primarily concerned with aspects of poetics: the role of the imagination, the relationship between poetry and philosophy, comparisons between poetry and painting. Whether he is discussing metaphor or painting, Stevens frequently relates his subject to the context of the present

day and in these passing references reveals his disturbance at the conditions around him. In "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" he discusses the reigning "spirit of negation" in his time; in "The Figure of Youth as Virile Poet" he writes of the present day as "a leaden time"; in "Poetry and Painting" he refers to the modern world as "uncompromising" and in "Rubbings of Reality" he mentions "the chaos of life today." (2)

Stevens probes our modern condition most fully in his discussion of the relationship between poet and reader in "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words." He fashions a modern reader who cannot "yield" himself to the figures of nobility in Plato's Phaedrus. For Stevens, this reader is paradigmatic of the reader a modern poet must address; he cannot yield himself to Plato's figure because of the "pressure of reality."

Stevens defines his terms:

By the pressure of reality, I mean the pressure of an external event or events on the consciousness to the exclusion of any power of contemplation. (3)

For Stevens, the reader's ability to absorb himself in poetry is ultimately dependent upon the "pressure of reality." If the pressure of external events demands that he engage himself in "what is direct and immediate and real," he will not be able to yield himself to the poet's words. (4)

Later in the same essay, Stevens describes the pressure of

modern reality as so great that his hypothetical reader can barely identify the events of his time let alone save a place for contemplation. As Stevens discusses the dynamic between poet and reader, he offers us a portrait of his time:

For more than ten years now, there has been an extraordinary pressure of news - let us say, news incomparably more pretentious than any description of it, news, at first, of the collapse of our system, or call it, of life; then of news of a new world, but of a new world so uncertain that one did not know anything whatever of its nature, and does not know now, and could not tell whether it was to be all-English, all-German, all-Russian, all-Japanese, or all-American, and cannot tell now; and finally news of a war, which was a renewal of what, if it was not the greatest war, became such by its continuation. And for more than ten years, the consciousness of the world has concentrated on events which have made the ordinary movement of life seem to be the movement of people in the intervals of a storm. The disclosures of the impermanence of the past suggested and suggest, an impermanence of the future. Little of what we believed has been true... (5)

Stevens suggests that the events of the "last ten years"-- the American economic crisis, the world-wide rise of extreme nationalism and communism, World War II -- have transformed our world, brought about "the collapse of our system, or, call it, of life." Stevens is markedly vague in his references to events; we only know the specific events by bringing our knowledge to his words. His vagueness, however, serves to

illustrate his point that the news defies description, "is incomparably more pretentious than any description of it." By insistently repeating the word "news," Stevens stylistically demonstrates how difficult it is to identify and come to terms with these events and emphasizes the immeasurable pressure they have exerted on our consciousness.

The collapse of our system and the emergence of a totally new world have thrust us into an uncertainty as boundless as the events themselves. Stevens stresses how little we know of our present world when he writes -- "one did not know anything whatever of its nature, and does not know now,... could not tell... and cannot tell now..." With his image of the nature of our movement, Stevens intensifies the sense of our uncertainty and loss of power; "our ordinary movement" can no longer be measured by our social, political, or economic order, but only by the recurrent upheavals of nature.

Stevens insists that the cultural breakdown is not temporary; it has been so deep that our entire notion of time has been altered. He stresses this state of temporal suspension once again in "The Irrational Element in Poetry," and poignantly asserts our need for poetry in such a world:

We have a sense of upheaval. We feel  
threatened. We look from an uncertain present  
toward a more uncertain future....If politics  
is nearer to each of us because of the pressure

of the contemporaneous, poetry, in its way, is no less so and for the same reason. (6)

On first reading, there seems to be little stylistic similarity in Valéry's and Stevens' social commentary: Valéry is specific and thorough in his analyses, Stevens, almost determined in his sweeping generalizations. On closer examination, however, we can see a similar progression in their thought processes. If we take a closer look at the passage just examined from "Noble Rider" and from Valéry's portrait of his time in "Notre Destin et les Lettres," (quoted in Chapter I, page 40) we will be able to better see the similarities in the way they perceive their worlds and more clearly hear the Valéryan echo in Stevens' language.

In "Notre Destin et les Lettres" and "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" Valéry and Stevens stress the force and speed of the changes in the world and our consequent loss of control. Valéry elaborates on his opening idea that we have become increasingly distanced from what has been the fundamental condition of all human life by using a guiding idea of speed and space throughout the passage. He charts a course of events that becomes unnervingly rapid -- "nous nous sommes de plus en plus éloignés des conditions primitives de toute vie... avec une rapidité qui s'accélère, jusqu'à devenir inquiétante -- until it creates a characteristic, almost

permanent state of "complexité," instabilité," désordre." (7)  
Just as swiftly as it establishes its permanence, this current of change robs us of all control; we have come so far from everything we have known that we can no longer rely on lessons of the past for our future direction.

Stevens, like Valéry, sees that we have reached a critical juncture in time where "nothing we have believed has been true," where the past is nullified and we live in a constant state of uncertainty. In the above passage, Stevens builds on his idea of the "pressure of news." Both the speed and number of events in the ten years leading up to this essay have created such an "extraordinary pressure of news" that life as we have known it has collapsed and we are faced with an unknown world. Similar to Valéry's speed of events, Stevens' pressure of news has thrust us into a seemingly permanent state of impermanence, where the past offers us no guidance toward the future.

It is particularly striking for our discussion of the flux that both Valéry and Stevens turn to images of natural disorder to emphasize the force of change and our powerlessness. It is as if, bereft of social, political, economic, and cultural order, both poets turn to all that they perceive as left --the raw movement of nature -- to stress our

loss. For Valéry, we are absorbed into the changes as an animal is drawn into quicksand. And for Stevens, the pressure of news, of reality, has been so extreme that there is no "ordinary movement of life" as we had previously understood it; we are thrown into the flux of nature.

Valéry and Stevens are often cited as poets who remove themselves from their social and political contexts. (8) It is therefore ironic that, in these brief passages, both poets suggest that it is the force and pressure of historical events that throw us into an ahistorical world. Increasingly distanced from what we have considered basic to our human condition, Valéry asserts that we can hardly look, as we have throughout history, to the past for future direction. Stevens likewise argues that the collapse of our system has proven our previous ideas of the past untrue. Since we can no longer look to the past for a sense of permanence and we cannot see for the future anything but the impermanence of the present, we belong consequently to a timeless, valueless world.

While both poets believe that the chaos of modern life causes a rupture between the past and the present, for each, the principal cause of this rupture differs. Valéry continually points to the pace of technological progress and political change as posing the greatest threat to our notions

of ourselves and our contemplative lives, and he devotes much of his prose to these issues. While Stevens certainly acknowledges the profound dangers that political upheavals and technological change present, he asserts that we find ourselves at such an historical turning point because in the midst of such disorder, we have also lost our belief in any divine order. Such a spiritual crisis pervades Stevens' work in both prose and poetry. He writes in "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words":

This much ought to be said to make it a little clearer that in speaking of the pressure of reality, I am thinking of life in a state of violence, not physically violent, as yet, for us in America, but physically violent for still more millions of our enemies and spiritually violent it may be said for everyone alive.(9)

That we find ourselves in an "epic of disbelief," without the voice of any god to cushion the harshness of our experience is, for Stevens, the mark of our modernity. (10) Consequently, any poetry or theory of poetry must take this spiritual loss and our need for belief into account. Stevens constructs his poetic theory that each poem must create a precise and delicate balance between the imagination and reality, to a large degree, with this spiritual crisis in mind. He contends in "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" that if the poet's imaginative figures do not heighten or enhance the reader's sense of

reality, he (we) will disbelieve the poem, just as he (we) has withdrawn his belief from divine figures. (11) Each of Stevens' essays and poems, however obliquely, addresses itself to the question of the role of the poet, of poetry, in view of our loss of belief in divine systems. Of the dissolution of the gods and its significance to an understanding of Stevens, J.

Hillis Miller writes:

This evaporation of the gods, leaving a barren man in a barren land, is the basis of all Stevens' thought and poetry. (12)

As Hillis Miller indicates, the modern spiritual crisis is the largest and single most important aspect of Stevens' work. Because the "annihilation of the gods" figures so fundamentally into Stevens' vision of the world, and it is with his poetic attempts to portray the world that we are most concerned, we must take a closer look, however necessarily brief, to acknowledge the depth of this crisis and its effect on Stevens' work.

At the center of our modern consciousness, Stevens maintains in "Two or Three Ideas," there is a basic disengagement between the gods and our belief in them. Stevens offers a portrait of both their dissolution or disappearance and our place in the world in this essay. He writes:

To see the gods dispelled in mid-air and dissolve like clouds is one of the great human experiences. It is not as if they had gone over the horizon to disappear for a time; nor as if they had been overcome by other gods of greater power and profounder knowledge. It is simply that they came to nothing. Since we have always had a part of their strength and, certainly all of their knowledge, we shared likewise this experience of annihilation. It was their annihilation, not ours, and yet it left us feeling that in a measure, we, too, had been annihilated. It left us feeling dispossessed and alone in a solitude, like children without parents, in a home that seemed deserted, in which the amical rooms and halls had taken on a look of hardness and emptiness. What was most extraordinary is that they left no mementoes behind, no thrones, no mystic rings, no texts either of the soil or of the soul. It was as if they had never inhabited the earth. There was no crying out for their return. They were not forgotten because they had been a part of the glory of the earth. At the same time, no man ever muttered a petition in his heart for the restoration of these unreal shapes. There was always in every man the increasingly human self, which instead of remaining the observer, the non-participant, the delinquent, became constantly more and more all there was or so it seemed; and whether it was so or merely seemed so still left it for him to resolve life and the world in his own terms. (13)

Stevens stresses the finality of the gods' disappearance throughout the above passage. In the first few lines, he uses verbs that underline their complete absence -- the gods are "dispelled," they "dissolve." This dissolution, he maintains,

is neither temporary nor a result of a struggle for divine dominance: "It is simply that they (the gods) came to nothing." Stevens further emphasizes the finality of their disappearance later in the same passage; so total is their absence that there are no physical vestiges of their existence-- "no thrones, no mystic rings, no texts either of the soil or of the soul. It was as if they never inhabited the earth."

(14)

At the same time as Stevens hails the dissolution of the gods as "one of the great human experiences," he suggests the depth of our loss. Because they were part of us, and we a part of them, because, as Stevens writes later in the same essay, "their fundamental glory is the fundamental glory of men and women, who being in need of it create it," their disappearance, their annihilation, is ours as well. A writer attentive to sound as much in prose as in poetry, Stevens accentuates the largeness of the gods' role and the extent of their absence by juxtaposing his assertion that "they came to nothing with his repetition of "all": "Since we have always shared all things with them and have always had a part of their strength... and certainly all of their knowledge..." thereby underscoring the impact their disappearance has on our sense of ourselves.

Once the gods have vanished, how do we feel? Deprived

of our partnership with the gods, Stevens asserts that we find ourselves suddenly foreign in our world. Without the gods to mediate, to clarify our place in the physical world, that world is instantly transformed into a harsh and meaningless place. With the dissolution of the gods then comes a transformation from security to loss, from happiness to unhappiness. Stevens once more emphasizes the all/nothing dichotomy, the totality of the gods' disappearance and the nothingness that results when he writes "the amical rooms and halls had taken on a look of hardness and emptiness."

If Stevens' entire attitude toward our loss of divine belief could be summed up by this transformation, if he believed that before the gods' dissolution we were satisfied and after, unambiguously marked by unhappiness, then the issue of belief would hardly be as complex an issue as it is. For Stevens, much as we might feel our loss, much as we might yearn for the simpler or clearer relation to our world that the gods provided, there is not one among us who "ever muttered a petition in his heart for the restoration of those unreal shapes." At the same time we, as moderns, feel the sting of our loneliness, at the same time we feel our dispossession most keenly, we also feel that, in a way, we are beginning to see the world for the first time. Stevens suggests the emergence

of a new world view and a new consciousness in the last few lines of the above passage.

There was always in every man the increasingly human self, which instead of remaining the observer, the non-participant, the delinquent, became constantly more and more all there was or so it seemed; and whether it was so or merely seemed so still left it for him to resolve life and the world in his own terms. (15)

That Stevens sees an emergent consciousness is evident in his language. " the increasingly human self ... became constantly more and more all there was." While we have not a wholly formed notion of ourselves nor a clear picture of our world, Stevens suggests that we are in the very process of realizing ourselves and our relation to the world.

As we have seen, Valéry and Stevens emphasize different causes for the rupture between the past and the present, for our modern sense of impermanence. However much their analyses of modern society may differ, their perceptions of the world in which they find themselves are remarkably similar. Deprived of an external order -- political and social in Valéry's case, cultural and divine in Stevens'-- to focus their vision, both poets discover that the only constant in the world is the constant succession of change. Both poets see the external world in such a state of flux: for Stevens the river never flows the same way twice, the wind never duplicates its own

sound or force; for Valéry, no two twilight moments are exact. Moreover, their attempts to attain a picture of the external world, to understand its workings, only make them more conscious of the ever-moving nature of their own minds.

Stevens, like Valéry, does not examine the flux in any methodical or organic manner, yet he touches upon aspects of the subject throughout his writing. Because the world in which he finds himself is a world of movement and change, any poem that he writes, any intellectual problem that he considers elaborates on his perception of the flux of the world. In each of the following passages, Stevens discusses a variety of subjects; in the first two he probes a modern definition of nobility; in the third, the role of the imagination in the creation and understanding of poetry and in the fourth, the notion of resemblance as the basis of all things in nature and poetry. So that we may understand the meaning of such concepts as "nobility," "imagination," "resemblance," Stevens relates these ideas to aspects of the external or natural world.

-As in the case of an external thing, nobility resolves itself into an enormous number of vibrations, movements, changes... (16)

-As a wave is a force and not the water of which it is composed, which is never the same, so nobility is a force and not the manifestations of which it is composed, which are never the same. (17)

-It is so easy to say in a universe of life and death that the reason itself lives and dies and, if so, that the imagination lives and dies no less. (18)

-Nature is not mechanical to that extent for all its mornings and evenings, for all its inhabitants of China or India or Russia; for all its waves, or its leaves, or its hands. Its prodigy is not identity but resemblance and its universe of reproduction is not an assembly line but an incessant creation. (19)

In "The Noble Rider and the Sounds of Words," one of Stevens' aims is to show how concepts are not fixed entities; that is, "nobility" is not a static idea; it evolves and changes as we and our civilizations evolve. So it is with the world; for Stevens, the world external to the mind is not made up of a number of physical entities -- trees, flowers, mountains, houses, etc. Rather, we perceive the universe in its ever-changing aspect as "an enormous number of vibrations, movements, changes." The physical world is not defined by its composition, "a series of static objects extended in space," but by what activates these objects, the unseen power that puts the world in motion, not the water that makes up the wave, but the "force" that propels their endless succession. (20)

To stress the continuum of the life of the imagination and the binding integrative force of resemblance, Stevens again turns to the workings of the natural world. He intimates that

our universe is not static or still, for in a universe of life and death, all living things live, decline, and die, and other living things replace them; our universe is thus in a constant state of change. To see the universe as a world of life and death, however, is not to see it as barren nor to reduce it to a "mechanical succession." When Stevens discusses resemblance in "Three Academic Pieces," he suggests that to grasp the movement, the binding force of resemblance that underlies natural repetition is to touch the creative fund of all life. The world of life and death is a world that constantly renews itself, a "universe of reproduction," an "incessant creation."

Stevens' grasp of the "fluctuating appearance" and changing nature of the physical world is reminiscent of Valéry's perceptions of the external universe. Valéry maintains in "L'homme et la coquille," that, an object, at any given moment, represents one stage in a continually changing process of transformation -- "l'objet n'est en soi, qu'un état, parmi d'autres d'une suite de transformations..." (21) Given its transformative nature, we can hardly perceive such an object as a solid, stable entity. As we have just seen, for Stevens, as for Valéry, objects in the world do not "resolve" themselves into fixed or permanent forms. Rather, they break down into "vibrations, movements, changes."

Stevens' "universe of life and death" is also reminiscent of Valéry's vision of the world of living things. In his essay on Goethe, Valéry praises Goethe for his understanding and expression of what Valéry believes is the transformative essence of all life: "toute forme vivante est un élément d'une transformation et toute partie de quelque forme est peut-être une modification de quelque autre." (22) While Stevens does not elaborate on his "universe of life and death" to the extent that Valéry does in his work, his suggestion that in such a universe all living things belong to a cycle of continuous change, he echoes Valéry's understanding that all living forms represent one stage in a continuous transformative process.

For Valéry, we can best perceive the external world if we grasp the principle of activity that marks the universe. He praises Goethe later in the same essay for his attention to this principle -- "Il recherche les forces sous les formes." (23) Stevens' use of the word "force" in "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" strikes a resonant Valéryan chord. Similar to Valéry, he sees the force that activates the universe, the force of the waves beneath their forms, as its most distinguishing feature.

While both Valéry and Stevens can, at times, seem to regret the certainty, the fixity that they believe existed in

earlier periods of time, both see in the "universe of life and death", if not the promise of transcendence, a great potential for human creativity. In "L'homme et la coquille," the "suite de transformations" of the seashell does not arrive at any specific end; its process, and by extension the processes of all living things and works of art, are boundless. Valéry's discovery of the possibility inherent in the transformative nature of the world finds expression once more in Stevens' assertion that the universe of life and death is not a "mechanical succession," but "an incessant creation." The activity of resemblance implies, like Valéry's human replica of the seashell, a universe that constantly renews itself -- "a universe of reproduction", an "incessant creation."

That Stevens sees the mind as infinitely moving as the external world is clear if we take another look at the passages just examined. In "The Noble Rider" Stevens asserts that "nobility," like the "external thing(s)," "resolves itself into an enormous number of vibrations, movements, changes." As a "peculiarity of the imagination," Stevens maintains that he cannot offer a precise definition of "nobility." (24) To be true to the nature of the imagination, he must rather present a sense of nobility, for "to fix it is to put an end to it." (25) By so asserting the moving, changing nature of a product of

the mind, Stevens thus suggests the ever-changing nature of the mind itself. He again implies the ever-moving quality of the mind in his use of the word "force" to describe the concept of "nobility." Similar to the wave which is characterized by its force, so the concept of nobility is a force, a perpetually changing process.

Stevens once again suggests the correspondence between the movement of mind and world in his statement concerning the life and death of the imagination. Just as the physical world is a "universe of life and death," so qualities of our mental lives -- the reason and the imagination -- "live and die no less." Just as plants grow, live, thrive and decline, so it is with our thoughts -- they are born, flourish, pass and give way to others in an ever-renewable process.

The mind, like the external world, is to be understood then, not as a static entity, but as an active unlimited principle. In "The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet," Stevens maintains that while the poet does not insert his ego directly into his work, the "process of his personality" is most certainly a factor in its achievement. Of the process of the poet's personality, he writes:

This is the element, the force, that keeps  
poetry a living thing, the modernizing and  
ever-modern influence. (26)

As an aspect of the poet's mind, his "personality" is not a fixed, still entity; it, too, is a "force."

Stevens comes closest to explicitly stating that the essential characteristic of the mind is its ever-changing or ever-moving nature in his reference to the French philosopher Xavier Doudan.

'Il y a longtemps que je pense que celui qui n'aurait que les idées claires serait assurément un sot.' The reply to this is that it is impossible to conceive of a man who has nothing but clear ideas; for our nature is an illimitable space through which the intelligence moves without coming to an end.  
(27)

Clarity, Stevens asserts, is not the nature of our minds; rather, what characterizes the mind most are its mobile and undefinable qualities -- "The intelligence moves without coming to an end."

Both Stevens and Valéry maintain that the mind, by nature, does not resist or fix the "action incessante de l'univers," and the "vibrations, movements, changes," but rather is marked by a corresponding mobility. In his essays, Valéry frequently refers to "la mobilité essentielle de l'esprit," and the mind's characteristic "variation lente."

(28) As we have seen, Stevens, like Valéry, sees a corresponding mobility in the mind and natural world. We can

see evidence of this especially in the way that he uses features of the natural world -- the wave, the organic process of life and death, natural repetition -- to elucidate the ever-changing processes of the mind -- the concept of "nobility", the reason and imagination, the activity of resemblance. While both poets see the changing nature of both the mind and world, Valéry, however, tends to focus more on the negative aspects of the mind's mobility; that is, he expresses a greater disturbance than Stevens at how the mobility of the mind hampers the clarity of our ideas. Of all the passages we have looked at, Stevens sounds most like Valéry in his comments on Xavier Doudan, for there he draws our attention to the lack of clarity intrinsic to the human mind.

As we have seen, Valéry and Stevens perceive a crisis in the modern world, arrive at a similar understanding of the sense of impermanence that it unleashes, and share a vision of the universal flux. A crucial issue for each poet is the role of the poet and the place of poetry in such a world. Does poetry address the modern crisis directly? Can the poet help us to come to terms with the ever-moving world and if it is the poet's role, how can he or she express or represent the flux? It is in their answers to these questions that we find the strongest aesthetic and philosophic affinity between Valéry and

Stevens.

While both poets acknowledge the depth of the modern crisis, neither sees a direct social or political role for the poet. While Valéry certainly devotes many of his essays to contemporary problems such issues are notably absent from his poems. (29) Stevens, too, asserts that the poet is not, by nature, a social or political orator; he clearly expresses his position in "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words": "One does not love and go back to one's ancient mother as a social obligation." (30)

What role, then, does poetry have, as Stevens writes in "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words," in "helping us to live our lives"? (31) According to both Valéry and Stevens, one of poetry's principal roles is to guide us from the disorder of the world to a distinct poetic order. As we have discussed earlier, Valéry devotes much of his work, particularly in his notebooks, to defining the contours of such a poetic order. He examines various disciplines -- architecture, music, mathematics, philosophy, among others -- with particular attention to how these systems construct order out of the disorder of the world and to how their methods might help him arrive at a more precise notion of poetic order. (32) Stevens' prose similarly reflects his concern with the human need for

order and the poet's role in fulfilling that need. He maintains in "A Collect of Philosophy," that all human endeavors or acts aim to "integrate," to order our experience and vision. (33)

When he writes of Williams' need to write in "Rubbings of Reality," he suggests that the very act of writing expresses our underlying need to move in the direction of order: "It is of our nature that we proceed from the chromatic to the clear, from the unknown to the known." (34)

That poetry specifically addresses our need for order is clear in the way Stevens discusses the gift of the poet and the power of the imagination. He writes in "The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet":

Genius is not our concern. We are trying to  
define what we mean by that special  
illumination, special abundance and severity of  
abundance, virtue in the midst of indulgence,  
order in disorder that is involved in the idea  
of virility. (35)

As Stevens probes the power of the young poet, he presents the abilities, the special qualities that such a figure must possess. He suggests that the poet does not necessarily make order out of chaos; his very vision is a virtue, an order. By the way he sees, through his imaginative vision of reality, Stevens maintains that the poet helps us to perceive order in disorder. He asserts this most clearly in "The Imagination as Value":

The imagination is the power that enables us to perceive the normal in the abnormal, the opposite of chaos in chaos. (36)

In the act of "probing for an integration" or order, both Valéry and Stevens suggest that the poet does indeed fulfill our distinctly modern need for order. Valéry believes that the poet's role, in a world that threatens our ability to reflect upon ourselves, is to resist the accelerating pace of life and the larger movement of the universe, to preserve a place for contemplation. Stevens echoes Valéry's call for the creation of a contemplative sphere in the poem, in "The Irrational Element in Poetry," when he writes:

Resistance to the pressure of ominous and destructive circumstance consists of its conversion, so far as possible, into a different, an explicable, an amenable circumstance. (37)

Similar to Valéry's poet who must resist the flux in order to create a lasting contemplative figure, Stevens sees the poet as "resisting the pressure of reality" and "converting" disorder or destruction into an order. For both Valéry and Stevens then, while the poet might not address himself directly to immediate social issues, by resisting the pace of the external world, by converting "destructive circumstance" into a poetic order, he indirectly addresses our modern need.

Both poets maintain that the poet must create an order,

but one that does not wholly fix the movement of the universe. While they share a similar aim, the framework within which Valéry and Stevens conceptualize that aim differs. As we have discussed earlier, Valéry sees the modern crisis specifically in terms of how technological progress and the pace of life threaten our need to reflect and contemplate, while Stevens sees the modern crisis primarily in spiritual terms. It is particularly because of our loss of belief in divine systems that Stevens believes that we face the essential chaos of the mind and world. Consequently when he writes of his poetic aims, Stevens addresses these aims to that spiritual crisis.

Stevens asserts that, in the wake of our loss of belief in divine systems, it remains the poet's task to "provide the satisfactions of belief." (38) However, he maintains that it is not his task to create or substitute another system of belief; rather, the poet's search becomes largely a search for truth. In "Poetry and Painting" Stevens asserts that poetic and painterly efforts are "exertions to find the truth" (39) and in "Two or Three Ideas" he explicitly states that "a time of disbelief is also a time of truth-loving." (40)

Stevens' assertion that we live in "a time of truth-loving" might at first suggest that he believes in the existence of an absolute truth. However, his central poetic

idea -- that the poem consists of a precise and delicate balance that must be achieved anew in every poem -- contradicts the very idea of a static or absolute truth. Because the poet sees reality differently in each poem, each poem expresses a truth that coexists with an infinite number of other truths. He writes in "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" of poetic truth as:

...an agreement with reality, brought about by the imagination of a man disposed to be strongly influenced by his imagination, which, he believes, for a time to be true. (41)

As an "agreement with reality," poetic truth cannot be neatly circumscribed. "True" to the changing way of the mind and world, each poetic truth "exists for a time."

We have discussed how Valéry and Stevens write of their poetic aims within different conceptual frameworks: Valéry writes in terms of creating a place for contemplation and Stevens, in terms of creating belief or "confidence." Despite such differences, however, we can still discern some fundamental similarities in their poetic objectives. We may remember from Chapter One how important it is for Valéry to find a poetic language expressive of the movement of the world. In "Études et Fragments sur le rêve," he writes:

Le réel est ce dont on ne peut s'éveiller, ce dont nul mouvement ne me tire, mais que tout

mouvement renforce, reproduit, régénère. Le non-réel, au contraire, naît à proportion de l'immobilisation partielle...Le fixe engendre le faux. (42)

According to Valéry, the poet must remain true to the movement of the mind and world; to fix it, to arrest that movement would be to present a false notion of reality. As we have just seen, Stevens, too, considers the poet's aim to "provide the satisfactions of belief" in terms of a search for truth.

Stevens does not aim to find an absolute truth; rather, he longs, like Valéry, to present in each poem "a truth," an imaginative picture of an ever-changing reality.

The greatest bond between Valéry and Stevens, then, lies in their mutual ambition to present, not one fixed or absolute vision of the world, but poems that express their own variable vision of a changing reality. In his notebooks, Valéry writes "Mon point de vue philosophique est la diversité de points de vue." (43) Consequently, one of Valéry's central poetic objectives, as we have discussed in greater detail earlier, is to write poems that express such a diversity of viewpoints. Stevens' notion of the poem as expressive of "agreements with reality...that exist for a time," closely follows upon Valéry's philosophic point of view. With each poem, Stevens repositions himself and sees the world anew. For both poets, then, each poem ideally expresses a difference, however slight or great,

in the way we see the world, a world that we perceive and which appears "never the same way twice." (44)

## NOTES

- (1) Wallace Stevens, The Palm at the End of the Mind (New York: Vintage Books, 1972) p.322
- (2) Wallace Stevens, The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination (New York: Vintage Books, 1951) pp.17, 64, 167
- (3) Wallace Stevens, "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" in The Necessary Angel p.20
- (4) Wallace Stevens, "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" p.22
- (5) Wallace Stevens, "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" p.20
- (6) Wallace Stevens, Opus Posthumous (New York: Vintage Books, 1982) p.225
- (7) Paul Valéry, "Notre Destin et les Lettres" Oeuvres II (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Gallimard, 1957) p.1059
- (8) Charles Doyle, (ed) Wallace Stevens; The Critical Heritage (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985) While Valery devotes some essays to political and historical questions, both politics and history are notably absent from his poems. Very few of Stevens' poems are concerned with social issues, yet, he, too, writes of contemporary problems in his essays. See the Critical Heritage series for a fuller examination of the critical controversies surrounding this issue.
- (9) Wallace Stevens, "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" in The Necessary Angel p.26-27
- (10) Wallace Stevens, "Sad Strains of a Gay Waltz" in The Palm at the End of the Mind p.116
- (11) Wallace Stevens, "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" p.3
- (12) J. Hillis Miller, "Wallace Stevens' Poetry of Being" in

R.H. Pearce and J. Hillis Miller (eds.) The Act of the Mind: Essays on the Poetry of Wallace Stevens (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1969) p.144

- (13) Wallace Stevens, "Two or Three Ideas" in Opus Posthumous p.206-207
- (14) Wallace Stevens, "Two or Three Ideas" p.207
- (15) Wallace Stevens, "Two or Three Ideas" p.207
- (16) Wallace Stevens, "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" in The Necessary Angel p.34
- (17) Wallace Stevens, "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" p.35
- (18) Wallace Stevens, "The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet" in The Necessary Angel p.40
- (19) Wallace Stevens, "Three Academic Pieces" in The Necessary Angel p.73
- (20) Wallace Stevens, "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" in The Necessary Angel p.31
- (21) Paul Valéry, "L'Homme et la coquille, Oeuvres I (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Gallimard, 1957) p.895
- (22) Paul Valéry, "Discours en l'honneur de Goethe" Oeuvres I p.543
- (23) Paul Valéry, "Discours en l'honneur de Goethe" p.543
- (24) Wallace Stevens, "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" in The Necessary Angel p.33
- (25) Wallace Stevens, "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" p.34
- (26) Wallace Stevens, "The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet" in The Necessary Angel p.45
- (27) Wallace Stevens, "The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet" p.53

- (28) Paul Valéry, Oeuvres I (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Gallimard, 1957) Quotations are from "Note et Digression" and "Victor Hugo" pp.1226 and 583
- (29) A collection of various essays on political and historical issues appears in Oeuvres I, Essais quasi politiques p.971-1138 and in Oeuvres II, Regards sur le monde actuel et autres essais p.913-1159
- (30) Wallace Stevens, "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" in The Necessary Angel p.28
- (31) Wallace Stevens, "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" p.36
- (32) For a closer look at Valéry's understanding of architecture see "Histoire d'Amphion," and for his discussion of dance see "Degas, Danse, Dessin" in Oeuvres II pp.1272, 1172. In the "Langage" section of his Cahiers I, Valéry writes of his notions of mathematical order.
- (33) Wallace Stevens, "A Collect of Philosophy" in Opus Posthumous p.196
- (34) Wallace Stevens, "Rubbings of Reality" in Opus Posthumous p.255
- (35) Wallace Stevens, "The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet" in The Necessary Angel p.66
- (36) Wallace Stevens, "The Imagination as Value" in The Necessary Angel p. 153
- (37) Wallace Stevens, "The Irrational Element in Poetry" in Opus Posthumous p.225
- (38) Wallace Stevens, "Two or Three Ideas" in Opus Posthumous p.206
- (39) Wallace Stevens, "Poetry and Painting" in The Necessary Angel p.169
- (40) Wallace Stevens, "Two or Three Ideas" in Opus Posthumous p.214
- (41) Wallace Stevens, "The Noble Rider and the Sound of

Words" in The Necessary Angel p.54

(42) Paul Valéry, "Etudes et Fragments sur le rêve" Oeuvres I  
p.932

(43) Paul Valéry, "Philosophie," Cahiers I p.494

(44) Wallace Stevens, from "This Solitude of Cataracts" in  
The Palm at the End of the Mind p.321 "He never felt twice the  
same about the flecked river,/ Which kept flowing and never the  
same way twice..."

## Chapter Four

### "The Figure Concealed": Valéryan Echoes in Stevens'

#### Ideas of Music

Too many waltzes - The epic of disbelief  
 Blares oftener and soon, will soon be constant.  
 Some harmonious skeptic soon in a skeptical music

Will unite these figures of men and their shapes  
 Will glisten again with music, the music  
 Will be motion and full of shadows.

From "Sad Strains of a Gay Waltz" (1)

Stevens sounds a formidable call to the modern poet in the last stanzas of "Sad Strains of a Gay Waltz." This call carries a note of urgency: Before we can no longer yield ourselves to poetry, before our disbelief prevents us from finding solace in the sounds of words, the poet must create figures in which we search for an expression of ourselves. Stevens' "harmonious skeptic" must and will do nothing less than revitalize poetry so that its music expresses the "motion" and uncertainty, the "shadows" of our modern experience.

In Stevens' insistence that the poet create poetry that "glistens again with motion," we can simultaneously hear Valéry's ambition to musicalize poetry. Both poets find in musical ideas and techniques a language to clarify and execute

their poetic aims: Valéry, to express the fleeting nature of the world in a finite, but regenerative form; and, Stevens, to create a sense of wholeness (a sense of permanence), while at the same time remaining true to an ever-changing reality. While, of the two poets, Valéry's musical-poetic theory is the more comprehensive, Stevens' discussions of music and the auditory basis of poetry touch upon exactly those aspects of Valéry's ideas that comprise his self-conscious program to musicalize poetry.

Stevens devotes his essays to discussions of aspects of poetics and, while he gives some attention to music, he does not offer us, as Valéry does in his prose, a portrait of himself as a listener of music. However, in her biography of the poet, Joan Richardson does offer us such a portrait, and attests to the great influence many different kinds of music had upon Stevens. From his earliest years and throughout his life, Stevens was a careful listener of music ranging from his mother's piano accompaniment to religious hymns, from symphonic and piano music, to popular melodies and the new rhythms of jazz. Richardson gives us ample evidence that music often prompted careful meditations on the power of the art form. Notable among these is a letter of 1909 (January 10, 1909) in which, after attending a performance of a Schubert symphony,

Stevens probes the power that music/sound exerts on our memory. Richardson writes: "He noted how sound reanimated lost time and immortalized it in the flesh," and suggests that this meditation underlies such poems as "Sunday Morning" and "Peter Quince at the Clavier." (2)

It is clear from his reflections upon music in his essays that Stevens attributes great expressive power to music. In "The Effects of Analogy," he explores various analogies -- among them the mode of analogy to be found in the music of poetry -- for the way in which our experience of art merges with the form of the art work itself. As he examines the analogy between music and poetry, he discusses the power of narrative music:

When we hear the music of one of the great narrative musicians, as it tells its tale, it is like finding our way through the dark not by the aid of any sense but by an instinct that makes it possible for us to move quickly when the music moves quickly, slowly when the music moves slowly. It is a speed which carries us on and through every winding, once more to the world outside of the music at its conclusion. It affects our sight of what we see and it leaves it ambiguous, somewhat like one thing, somewhat like another. (3)

The power of "the great narrative musicians" lies in their ability to draw us into their tale. Stevens suggests that as we identify with the sequence of the tale, as we follow the musical passage, we move away from the exterior world and we

embark upon an inner voyage. As we listen to the music, Stevens suggests, we do not have any exterior signposts; rather, we can only find our way if we allow ourselves to follow an inner sense, our "instinct." He emphasizes the power that music has to distance us from the exterior world when he writes that our passage is "like finding our way through the dark."

So great is the power of music that it urges us, despite our inability to find our way through our senses, nevertheless to follow its movement. Stevens subtly suggests that music nearly usurps control over our reason as it draws us into its tale. For once we hear the music, in order to follow it, we must suspend our senses and follow by instinct. And, once we are drawn in, the music proclaims its control; it "carries us on and through every winding."

A key to music's power to draw us into "an interior passage" is its mobile nature. Stevens stresses that it is the movement of music that draws us into its tale in his description of music as a "speed" and in his use of active verbs to explain the way we follow its path: Our instinct enables us to "move quickly," "move slowly,;" the music "carries us through every winding." Stevens also seems to use a style in the passage that approximates the seductive movement

of the music itself. He invites us to listen to the music by using the pronoun "we," and then carries us , his readers, along in his use of long sinuous sentences in which we can almost feel the listener's identification with the musical passage.

The interior world into which music draws us is distinct from the exterior world, yet, at the same time, it affects our experience of the exterior world. Stevens suggests the intricacy of the musical inner world in his description of our passage from quick to slower tempos and of the "windings" through which the music carries us. Though we find ourselves once more in the "world outside of the music at its conclusion," Stevens suggests that our inner voyage touches us so profoundly that we no longer see the world in quite the same way.

That Stevens ascribes great power to music as an art form is clear from his discussion of how music draws us into a world within a world. However, it is important to note that he does not ascribe this power exclusively to music; that is, Stevens sees equivalent ability in other arts, such as painting and sculpture, as well. That he chooses to describe the power of art to create such an inner world in terms of music, however, illustrates Stevens' belief in the power and clarity of the art

form. In "The Imagination as Value," he once more uses music as an example of the way in which art can draw us into an enhanced reality, a world within, yet apart from our everyday world:

We ourselves crawl out of our offices and classrooms and become alert at the opera. Or we sit listening to music as in an imagination in which we believe. (4)

Stevens suggests that in our daily experience, there is a void; we need to believe in something beyond our concrete experience. Our attendance at the opera, or our listening to music, he suggests, provides us with such a place of belief; it invites us into an enhanced reality apart from our daily experience.

Stevens, however, does reserve a unique place for music among the arts and he makes this clear in his discussion of the importance of form in his essay "Whole Man: Perspectives, Horizons." In a passage in which he sounds remarkably similar to Valery, Stevens reflects upon the regenerative aspect of form and discusses essential principles of various art forms.

Of music he writes:

The principle of music would be an addition to humanity if it were not humanity itself, in other than human form..." (5)

Music, then, according to Stevens, takes a special place among the arts; its expression is inseparable from, synonymous with our humanity.

As we consider a comparison between Valéry's and Stevens' writings about music, we are first struck by the distinctions between them. Aside from Valéry's greater attention to the subject, the most marked difference is a theme that underlies Valéry's discussions of music. For Valéry, music is so uniquely expressive of exactly what he longs to express -- the mobility of the universe -- that, even as a listener, he cannot help but note the inadequacy of language in comparison. As we have just seen, such a theme is absent from Stevens' comments about music. While he is interested in music as an art form, and particularly drawn to it as a "mode of analogy" for poetry, for Stevens, music is not the paradigm of expression that it is for Valéry.

Once we acknowledge this essential difference, however, we can begin to see some very strong similarities in their approaches to music. Stevens' comments touch on areas that Valéry devotes great attention to, and, express quite similar viewpoints. Stevens' attention to the way music pulls us away from the exterior world and into an inner world recalls Valéry's more elaborate treatment of the same subject. In "Fragments et mémoires d'un poème," Valéry distinguishes between representational and non-representational art forms. He characterizes non-representational art forms under the

heading "la Musique pure" and exalts these for their ability to touch us most deeply. Music, he maintains, does not refer at all to exterior reality -- "réalité observable." Because its system is separate from all such reference, it excites our sensibility and detaches the listener from exterior reality -- "d'ordre chronologique" -- summoning us into a separate, intrinsic order of its own -- "d'ordre intrinsèque et instantané qui se déclare de proche en proche." He maintains later in the same essay that as a result of this ability to so draw us into a separate, non-referential system, music is able to most effectively express or represent the movement of our inner world. (6) Stevens' notion of the way music ushers us into an inner world -- a world in which we move by instinct rather than by sense or reason, seems to describe concretely Valéry's more analytical understanding of music's non-representational qualities. Stevens' listener, like Valéry's, cannot look to the world outside the music for guidance through the musical passage. Rather, as he listens, he becomes increasingly distanced from "réalité observable," and becomes identified, merges with the musical movement itself.

Music, for both Valéry and Stevens, draws us away from the pattern of daily life and ushers us into an enhanced world.

Stevens' assertion in "The Imagination as Value" that music provides us with a place where we can cast aside the banality of our routine existence evokes Valéry's fuller description of the unifying power of music. As we discussed in Chapter 1, according to Valéry, the unifying force of music offered the Symbolist poets (himself included) the strength to resist the fragmentation and disunity characteristic of their time.

Stevens' brief reference to the opera hall as an "imagination in which we can believe" similarly recalls Valéry's fuller description of the concert hall in "Au Concert Lamoureux." For Valéry and other Symbolist poets, the concert hall holds so much promise in its creation of a sense of unity that he refers to it as "cette forêt essentiellement magique," capable of creating "la condition religieuse par excellence, l'unité sensible d'une pluralité vivante." (7) Music, and specifically the concert hall is, then, so valued in its ability to lift us beyond our ordinary existence, that both poets endow it with a spiritual, a divine quality.

We noted, in our analysis of the passage from "The Effects of Analogy," Stevens' attention to the speed of music that enables us to so swiftly identify ourselves with the sequence of the musical tale and to follow its intricate windings. Stevens' grasp of music's speed or movement calls to mind

Valéry's in-depth analyses of music's intrinsic mobility. (8) Stevens stresses in his short descriptive passage exactly that element, that ability of music that sparks Valéry's lifelong exploration of those properties of music that he worked so hard to incorporate into his poetic theory -- properties that he believes facilitate its natural expression of movement -- its scale, self-enclosed system, and modulation, among other features of musical form.

Where Valéry's and Stevens' voices seem to sound in unison is in their expression of the essential principle of music. Valéry, we may remember from Chapter 1, sees musical images as the very embodiment of the transformations, the changes in states, that characterize our existence. He discusses this unique expressive power of music throughout his prose -- in his notebooks and in essays such as "Au Concert Lamoureux," "Propos de la Poésie," "Fragments et mémoires d'un poème," among many others. Stevens' portrayal of music in "Whole Man: Perspectives, Horizons," as "humanity itself in other than human form" echoes Valéry's reflections upon musical images in "Léonard et les philosophes." Valéry writes: "elles sont les transformations et des restitutions des faits vitaux, eux-mêmes qu'elles transmettent." (9) For both Valéry and Stevens, music is hardly a representation of our lives; its ability to express

our emotional lives is nothing less than the recreation of the vital principles that are the basis of our humanity.

Both Valéry and Stevens acknowledge the historical bond between music and poetry and turn to poetry's musical heritage to more clearly define the nature of modern poetry. As we saw in Chapter 1, Valéry himself finds validation for his ideas concerning form and the auditory nature of poetry in the musical origins of his art. In order to arrive at an understanding of the analogical basis of poetry, Stevens, too, devotes some attention to the traditional bond between poetry and music. And, while he asserts that "there has been a change in the nature" of the relationship between the two arts, Stevens still insists upon music as a "mode of analogy" for poetry. (10) He writes in "The Effects of Analogy":

...yesterday, or the day before, the time from which the use of the word 'music' in relation to poetry has come down to us, music meant something else. It 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. But with the disappearance of all this, the use of the word 'music' in relation to poetry is as I said a moment ago a bit old hat: anachronistic. 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. It 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. (11)

As he probes the musicality of modern poetry, Stevens briefly discusses the historical basis of the relationship between the two arts. Though he does not refer to ancient oral poetry, as Valéry does, he maintains that conventional poetic form -- "metrical poetry with rhyme schemes repeated stanza after stanza" -- created an actual music of poetry.

Modern poetry, however, no longer creates such a music. Stevens stresses the break between the poetic music of the past and present throughout the above passage. Taking modern free verse as his starting point, he broadly refers to the past as "yesterday or the day before," and maintains that the stricter formal analogy between music and poetry is a phenomenon of the past. Stevens emphasizes the sharp break between the past and present in the way he turns to the present moment and sweeps aside the actual music of conventional poetic form. Similar to the way his "gods are dispelled in mid-air," so the music of "yesterday" is cast aside; it simply disappears: "with the

disappearance of all this, the use of the word "music" in relation to poetry is ...a bit old hat... anachronistic." (12)

Stevens, however, insists upon a music for modern poetry. In place of the regular, recurrent "harmonious sounds, we hear the speaker of the poem. Stevens locates the musicality of modern poetry in the tones and feeling of the poetic speaker. He emphasizes the centrality of such a figure and his voice throughout the above passage: Modern poetic music is to be found in "a voice intoning," in the "measured voice" of a "figure concealed," in the "orator's speech." Addressing the question of the viability of the musical analogy for modern poetry, John Hollander writes in Vision and Resonance:

The only way in which we might save the analogy is by incorporating Stevens' evolution from song to speech. (13)

Stevens stresses that music is the speaker's variable expression of feeling when he writes that the speaker uses a voice "often disturbed by his feeling for what he says." He or she employs musical ornaments "only because he feels like doing it," only inasmuch as they express his or her immediate feeling.

While the change in the music of modern poetry is, as Stevens (and Hollander) maintains, a change from actual music to speech, Stevens makes it clear that the poet does not speak

plain speech. He suggests the distinction between our common speech and poetic speech in the way he refers to the poetic voice. This voice may not be the musical or singing voice that we once identified with poetry; yet it is still more identifiable by its tone than is our discursive speech.

--"It is the change from Haydn to a voice intoning." Stevens further insists upon the distinctive tones of poetic speech in his assertion that the voice is "like the voice of an actor reciting or declaiming." We listen to poetic speech much as we listen to an actor; we are more attentive to his tone and changes in his manner of speaking so that we can better distinguish the character, the feeling behind what is spoken. That the poet's identity is hidden --"the figure concealed"-- is yet another way that Stevens articulates the quality of the poetic voice; if we cannot see the speaker, if we cannot identify him, we listen more closely, more attentively to his voice.

The voice of modern poetry does not achieve music in the conventional sense; however, Stevens still reserves for it a certain musicality. The speaker "speaks with a measured voice"; by so using the musical term "measure", he maintains a rhythmic quality for the voice, however indefinite that rhythm or measure might be. Again, when Stevens writes that this

"measured voice" "is often disturbed by his feeling for what he says," he subtly suggests a particularly modern notion of musical poetry -- in which breaks in rhythm, interruptions in tone are some of the main features. Stevens once more emphasizes the irregular nature of modern poetic music in his assertion that the poet may occasionally use musical devices -- "the triangle or one of the cymbals," in order to express his feeling. While modern poetic music might not create the harmonious effect of music in its classical sense, its musicality, much as modern music itself, is to be found in the unpredictable voice of the poem, its irregular rhythms and measure, and its occasional resemblance to conventional music.

While Valéry and Stevens both look to poetry's musical past to better define the contours of modern poetry, their views of its musical heritage and the role it plays in modern poetic musicality differ in some essential ways. Valéry, we may recall from Chapter 1, asserts the bond between poetry's origins in song and his own practice of poetry. In his essay on Victor Hugo, he examines how ancient oral poetry's "système d'échange" between voice, hearing and memory assured poetry's transmission and survival. (14) In many essays, he suggests that the modern poet, by strictly adhering to form, by preserving the necessary distinctions between discursive and

poetic language, recreates such a "système d'échange," and, like the bard, assures the survival of his or her work. (15)

Stevens, too, considers the traditional bond between music and poetry and, while he does not, like Valéry, examine poetry's origins in song, he refers to the conventional music of poetry that "has come down to us." (16) In direct contrast to Valéry who longs to recreate the ancient process in modern terms, Stevens insists that there has been a break between past and present. The mode of analogy between music and poetry, as it has been handed down to us, he writes in "The Effects of Analogy, "is a bit old hat and romantic and, no doubt at all, the dated forms are intolerable." (17)

Valéry's emphasis on form suggests that he aims, in part, to create the kind of music that Stevens believes is "a bit old hat." The poet, according to Valéry, uses the tools of poetic convention -- "rimes, l'inversion, les figures développées, les images" -- to create a kind of music in poetry. (18) In his frequent references to the formal aspects of poetry that contribute to its musicality -- for example, "les timbres de Racine" that create a harmony, and the poetic rhythms and the resonance of certain vowels and consonants that lend themselves to performance in "Lettre à Madame C" -- Valéry suggests that the poet create what Stevens considers an "actual" music. (19)

As we have just seen, Stevens dismisses the formal musicality that Valéry urges and, while he still finds the musical analogy viable for poetry, it is in a wholly redefined sense.

Stevens defines a more modern music for poetry; however, in the way he places the voice at the center of his modern poetic music he notably recalls Valéry's frequent writings on the subject. As we have seen, Valéry maintains that the various formal aspects of the poem urge the reader to join or follow the poetic voice; it is the voice that draws us into the poem and sustains its movement. In "Première Leçon au cours de poétique," Valéry defines the poem specifically in terms of the voice: "Un poème est un discours qui exige et qui entraîne une liaison continuée entre la voix qui est et la voix qui vient et qui doit venir." (20) So distinct is the poetic voice that he attributes to it a divine quality. Poetry, he writes in the same essay, is "la divinisation de la voix." (21) While Stevens departs from Valéry's adherence to form, his conception of the voice is central to his redefinition of "what we mean by music." We might not expect the harmonious sounds that Valéry's form makes of his poetic voice, yet, for Stevens, as for Valéry, the voice determines poetic musicality. In place of Haydn, we listen to "a voice intoning," the "measured voice" of Stevens' "figure concealed." As we have just seen in our

examination of the passage from "The Effects of Analogy," in the way Stevens refers to the actor or hidden figure, he suggests that the tones and changes in the speaker's voice are the musicality of the poem. For both poets, the voice is so much the cohesive force of the poem that, as Valéry writes "Ôtez la voix et la voix qu'il faut, tout devient arbitraire."

(22)

Stevens does not consider the relationship between form and voice as Valéry does; however, in his treatment of the relationship between style and voice he recalls Valéry. For Valéry, the form of the poem and its voice are one. In "Cantiques spirituels," he maintains that the form of the poem necessitates a vocal transformation that unambiguously establishes the presence of true poetry. (23) The poetic voice then creates a momentum of its own; once we hear it, it obliges us to follow its movement. Stevens, in "Two or Three Ideas," considers the unity of "styles of poems, gods and men" and asserts that the style of the poem and the poem itself are one.

He writes:

Style is not something applied. It is something that permeates. It is of the nature of that which is found, whether the poem, the manner of a god, the bearing of a man. It is not a dress. It may be said to be a voice that is inevitable. (24)

Stevens aims, in the above passage, to convince his reader that

style, contrary to our more superficial assumptions, is not merely an external quality. Rather, style, the manner of presentation, is the poem, god, or man. To stress its expression of what is intrinsic to the poem (god, or man), Stevens relates style to voice; the style "may be said to be a voice that is inevitable." For Stevens, then, style, the presentation or manner of the poem, is its voice. Stevens does not, as Valéry does, write specifically of form and elaborate on its creation of the voice, yet, the way he relates the external shape of the poem to its voice, recalls Valéry's discussion of form and voice. For Stevens, as for Valéry, the manner of presentation of the poem -- whether it be in the shape of conventional poetic form or its overall manner, its style -- is at one with its voice. From its shape issues, for Valéry, "une voix qui doit venir," and for Stevens, "a voice that is inevitable." (25)

That Stevens defines a more modern music for poetry than Valéry is clear from his description of its unpredictable voice and irregular rhythms in "The Effects of Analogy." However, his insistence on those aspects of the poetic voice that distinguish it from discursive or ordinary speech summon Valéry's in-depth analyses of the distinctions between discursive and poetic language. Valéry contends through much

of his prose that the achievement of meaning is the main object of discursive language, while in poetry "c'est bien le non-usage, the non-dire 'qu'il pleut' qui est son affaire."

(26) It is, consequently, the poet's task to create a language as distinct from ordinary language as possible so that we (as readers) search not for meaning alone, but to reach a state, a feeling. To do so, the poet uses form and communicates "une vertu quasi musicale à l'expression de certaines pensées." (27)

As we have just seen, Stevens departs from Valéry's emphasis on conventional form; yet, he, too, stresses the difference between discursive and poetic language. Stevens' modern voice may be closer to speech than to Valéry's "vertu quasi musicale," yet in his insistence on a heightened or distinct voice -- his "voice intoning," his measured voice" -- and on its occasional resemblance to music, he preserves key Valéryan distinctions between poetic and discursive language. When Stevens emphasizes that the modern music of poetry is, in part, to be found in the speaker's expression of feeling -- in a voice "often disturbed by his feeling for what he says," -- he recalls Valéry's assertion that poetic language does not aim to achieve a meaning, but rather to create a state. While Stevens' speaker speaks with a more unpredictable rhythm, a more changeable or variable voice than Valéry's, both poets

claim that poetry speaks, not finite thoughts, but rather, as Stevens writes "the rhythms and tones of human feeling." (28)

A principal aim of Valéry's and Stevens' work is to arrest the fleeting world, to create a momentary permanence of the poem. Both poets' writings on the musicality of poetry -- its inherently auditory nature -- most clearly address this poetic and philosophic objective. When Stevens proclaims in "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" that "words, above everything else, are, in poetry, sounds," he echoes Valéry's insistence on the preeminence of sound in poetry, of poetry as "l'art d'abuser de la resonance des mots." (29) While Stevens does not consciously aim, like Valéry, to musicalize poetry, more than any other aspect of his work, his ideas about sound in the poetic process form the basis of his aim to revitalize poetry -- to make of it a language expressive of the motion and uncertainty of our modern experience.

In "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words," Stevens touches on issues that he explores throughout his work: the despair of the modern world, our crisis of belief, the effect of the "pressure of reality" on the poetic imagination, the idea of the mind and world in a constant state of change or flux, among many others. As much as he is concerned with all these problems in themselves, his main objective in the essay

is to clarify their relationship to the "path of poetry." (30)

To do so, towards the close of the essay, Stevens turns to the essential medium of poetry: our means of composing and understanding it, which is sound.

And what about the sound of words?... I do not know of anything that will appear to have suffered more from the passage of time than the music of poetry and that has suffered less. The deepening need for words to express our thoughts and feelings which, we are sure, are all the truth 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. Those of us who may have been thinking of the path of poetry, those who understand that words are thoughts and not only our own thoughts, but the thoughts of men and women ignorant of what it is they are thinking, must be conscious of this: that above everything else, poetry is words; and that words, above everything else, are, in poetry, sounds. (31)

That Stevens considers sound at the very basis of the poetic process is clear from the way he directly addresses the question of poetry in the above passage: "And what about the sound of words?" He underlines the centrality of sound again when he writes of the continuing vitality of its "music." As readers, we do not merely read poetry; rather, poetry is a verbal art addressed to our sense of hearing -- "We listen to words when we hear them." Stevens closes the passage with his

most emphatic assertion of the preeminence of sound in poetry: All who are concerned for the future of poetry must share the understanding that "above everything else, poetry is words, and that words, above everything else, are, in poetry, sounds."

We discussed at greater length in Chapter three Stevens' redefinition of the poet's role in the modern world: Amidst the disorder and disbelief of the modern world, the poet's task is to "provide the satisfactions of belief" by pursuing and presenting the truths of his or her imaginative experience.

(32) In the above passage, Stevens expresses these poetic and philosophic aims in auditory terms: the poet's and reader's pursuit of truth, for a sense of wholeness, is a search through sound for sound. As words in poetry "are, above everything else, ...sounds," when we read poetry, we embark on an auditory search "for all the truth we shall ever experience." Stevens suggests that our auditory search intensifies as we approach a sense of the truth: First we hear words, and as we listen more attentively, we grow to love and feel them so that we "search the sound of them" for a sense of a wholeness, a truth.

In Stevens' metaphors for the truth -- "a finality, a perfection, an unalterable vibration" -- Stevens suggests that, in poetry, we search, not for concrete meaning, not for a clear, paraphraseable truth, but for a sense of completion: "a

finality, a perfection." With his auditory image of the "unalterable vibration," he underscores both the auditory nature of poetry and its philosophical underpinnings. We listen to the poet's words, not to find at the poem's end a comprehensible truth, but rather for a sound, a vibration that is for a moment "unalterable." For the moment of its sounding, it provides us with a wholeness, a finality that allows us "just to know" how the truth might feel. (33)

In "Two or Three Ideas" Stevens' purpose is to discuss the modern need, even urgency for poetry: "to elevate the poem to one of the major significances of life." (34) To do so, he equates his subject -- styles of poems and poems themselves -- with styles of gods and men. Although he does not discuss the process of sound as it pertains to the poetic process as directly as he does in "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words," in the way Stevens urges his readers to accept the truth of his proposition -- that poems occupy as vital a place in life as gods and men -- he stylistically demonstrates how we come to recognize truth in poetry largely through sound, and particularly through the auditory quality of repetition:

Now, if the style of a poem and poem itself are one; if the style of the gods and the gods themselves are one; and if the style of men and men themselves are one; and if there is any true relation between these propositions, it

might well be the case that the parts of these propositions are interchangeable. Thus it might be true that the style of a poem and the gods themselves are one; or that the the style of the gods and the style of men are one; or that the style of a poem and the style of men are one. As we hear these things said, without having time to think of them, it sounds as if they might be true. (35)

Stevens posits that there is a unity between style and meaning as it pertains to poems, gods and men and he re-establishes this belief at the beginning of the passage. Once he reiterates this, he asks the reader to accept an idea that he has not previously discussed: "that the parts of these propositions are interchangeable." He then proceeds to interchange one proposition for another: "it might be true that the style of a poem and the gods themselves are one," etc. As readers, we have heard these phrases, these sounds repeated many times throughout the essay. As Stevens changes the order in which he uses these words, it becomes progressively more difficult to retain the concepts, to hold onto the meanings of the words. By so repeating the familiar words and sounds of the essay, Stevens posits a truth, perhaps greater than the meanings of the words themselves. He suggests that such a truth is perhaps greater than the boundaries of our reason, greater than our ability to comprehend it in the mind. He thus aims to urge our acceptance by rhetorical means, specifically

by repeating the sounds of the words. As we listen to the words repeated, ("As we hear these things said") we suspend our reason ("without having time to think of them") and we begin to believe that the words speak a truth ("it sounds as if they might be true.").

As he probes the workings of various poetic analogies in "The Effects of Analogy," Stevens once more suggests the auditory basis of poetry and achieves what is perhaps his most poignant definition of poetry. He writes:

There is always an analogy between nature and the imagination, and possibly poetry is merely the strange rhetoric of that parallel: a rhetoric in which the feeling of one man is communicated to another in words of exquisite appositeness that takes away all their verbliness. (36)

Stevens suggests that we write and read poetry to explore the most everpresent analogy of all -- that which exists between nature and our imagination. To that end, he argues, we use words to create a language, "a strange rhetoric." To grasp our imaginative part in the greater world about us, to communicate our feeling, Stevens writes, we use poetic language. However, the words that we use to arrive at the relationship between our inner world, and the world external to our minds, are not the same words that we use to transmit our more circumscribed thoughts; rather, words in poetry undergo a transformation.

The poet transforms words in poetry so that they are stripped of all their verballity.

One idea underlies and unifies the several passages we have looked at in which Stevens discusses sound and poetry: For the poet to create a truth in the poem and for the reader to believe in that truth, both must suspend reason. In "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words," Stevens emphasizes that the poet's pursuit of truth is largely an unconscious process when he writes that poetry expresses "the thoughts of men and women ignorant of what it is they are thinking." (37) In "Two or Three Ideas," in order to grasp the abstract truth of poetry's equal status with men and gods, Stevens' reader must not think of the meanings of the words; it is by "not having time to think of them" that he or she can, through listening, approach their larger truth. (38) In "The Irrational Element in Poetry," Stevens again argues that the poet uses the sounds of words to achieve a particular effect, an "effective integration." The poet himself, however, is probably not aware, in rational terms, of why he uses one word or sound rather than another -- "You have somehow to know the right sound and you do in fact know, without knowing how. Your knowledge is irrational." (39) And, in "The Effects of Analogy," he suggests that the poet uses words to create a non-verbal

language, one that transcends the language of discursive thought. For Stevens, then, the poet depends on the sounds of words -- the auditory component of poetry -- to attain a truth, to achieve an integration that he or she cannot reach through the discourse of reason.

As we have seen earlier in this chapter, when Stevens writes of the analogy between poetry and music, he insists that modern poetry no longer aims to create "a music" in its more formal or conventional sense, yet he insists on the viability of the musical analogy. Even more than his discussion of the vocal musicality of modern poetry, Stevens' understanding of the primacy of sound in poetry -- of the auditory basis of the poem -- keeps the musical analogy alive. At the basis of Stevens' writings about the need for truth, the modern need for belief in poetry, is his understanding that the poet uses the sounds of poetry, uses the non-verbal aspect of words to reach a kind of knowledge that we cannot reach through reason alone. By so creating a belief in the poem "beyond what its words can possibly say," Stevens suggests that the poet may create a momentary permanence in the passing moment. (40)

For both Stevens and Valéry, to theorize about poetry in terms of sound or music is not to substitute the language of music for the language of poetry; rather, to think of the

musicality of poetry is to probe the nature of an art that is intrinsically musical. While Valéry asserts that poetry is born of the exchange between sound and meaning, he argues that the poet considers poetic tone before everything else, including thought. He writes in "Cantiques spirituels": "Une alliance intime du son et du sens, qui est la caractéristique essentielle en poésie, ne peut s'obtenir qu'aux dépens de quelque chose, - qui n'est autre que la pensée". (41) Valéry emphasizes the preeminence of sound over meaning in the words of Mallarmé in "Souvenirs littéraires" -- "...ce n'est pas avec des idées qu'on fait des vers, c'est avec des mots." (42) When Stevens asserts that all concerned with the path of poetry share an understanding "that above everything else, poetry is words; and that words, above everything else, are, in poetry sounds," he echoes both Valéry and Mallarmé. All three poets stress that the poet's primary concern is sound or tone, and that as sounds, poetic words express a meaning that can only be understood in auditory terms.

Stevens' contention that the poet uses words to reach an understanding that he or she cannot attain through rational discourse suggests that he sees poetic words as distinct from the words of ordinary discourse. While he does not explore exactly how words differ in poetry, his insistence on their

difference calls to mind Valéry's great attention to the creation of a different class or system of words in poetry. As we have seen earlier, Valéry insists that poets use particular words more frequently than others and in the way they vary how these words are used -- for instance, in connection with other particular words or sounds and in varying contexts -- they create, with each sounding, a certain "resonance." Such resonance serves to distance these "key" words from their referential content and urges the reader to repeatedly listen to them and to search for a meaning, a sense beyond their more tangible or concrete meaning. In his notebooks, Valéry refers to these words as "mots-musiques," for rather than signalling to the reader a clear meaning, they, more like musical notes, express a state or feeling. Valéry writes that "mots-musique" express what we yearn to know rather than what we already comprehend: "ce qui est naissant et non né." (43) In "Je disais quelquefois à Mallarmé," he again asserts that resonant poetic words express a "state of becoming"; they probe what is not yet known rather than what we can rationally understand: "ils s'adressent à notre vie plus qu'à notre esprit ... ces paroles nous intimement de devenir, bien plus qu'elles ne nous excitent à comprendre." (44) As we have just seen, Stevens maintains that poets use words, as sounds, to probe "thoughts"

of which they themselves are unaware. Similar to Valéry's resonant words -- "mots-musique," -- Stevens' poetic words do not resolve into definite meaning; rather, they express what we do not yet know. While Stevens does not probe precisely how such words operate in the poem in nearly as much detail as Valéry does in his work, his ideas of the distinctive qualities of poetic words touch upon Valéry's more elaborate discussions.

We saw in our analysis of his discussion of styles of poems, gods and men, how, in order to urge his readers to accept the truth of his premise, Stevens uses the auditory or tonal quality of repetition. While he does not relate this process specifically to the poet's use of repetition, the way he uses repetition in that essay in order to guide the reader towards a sense of truth, recalls Valéry's more direct discussion of how poets use words to create a need for the reader to repeatedly listen to the sounds of poetry. Valéry argues in many essays, particularly in "Poésie et pensée abstraite," that we are at the threshold of poetry when poetic words prevent our merely reading a text. The sounds and ambiguities of poetic words urge the reader to repeatedly listen, to take pleasure in the sense they they evoke. (45) In his essay "Stéphane Mallarmé," Valéry relates this process to his own reading of Mallarmé. He insists that the words of the

poems do not lead him to any one clear meaning; rather the words themselves take on a physical aspect. Only by repeating the lines to himself can Valéry discover poetic meaning. He writes: "... en me répétant involontairement ces vers si difficiles à comprendre, je constatais que les énigmes s'atténuaient, la compréhension se dessinait." (46) In "Two or Three Ideas," Stevens employs the very process that Valéry insists is fundamental to the composition and understanding of poetry to convince his readers of a truth he believes cannot be reached solely by discursive means. By repeating the familiar sounds of the argument, Stevens dislocates the rational meaning that the reader expects the words to convey, hoping to draw his reader closer to the truth of his proposition.

To express the fleeting nature of the world in a form that allows us to contemplate our condition, without appearing to fix that movement; to write poetry that offers respite from the relentless movement and change of the world, Valéry insists that the poet must create a language totally distinct from discursive language. He calls for nothing less than a "rupture méthodique des associations et des formes toutes faites du langage." (47) To create such a poetic language, Valéry sets out to musicalize poetry. In that program, he calls on poets, not only to heighten the already auditory dimension of poetry,

but to borrow musical ideas and structures. Stevens, as we have seen, embarks on no such self-conscious musical program; however, in his discussions of how the poet uses sound to create a sense of truth or permanence, he focuses on exactly those elements of poetry upon which Valéry bases his musical endeavor: on the preeminence of sound over meaning, on the irrational component of poetic language and understanding, on the process of repetition in the understanding of such non-rational concepts or truths. In Stevens' metaphoric suggestion in "The Effects of Analogy" that the poet transform verbal into non-verbal language -- into "words of exquisite appositeness that take(s) away all their verballity" -- we can hear Valéry's voice in unison. (48) While he doesn't name music for that non-verbal poetic language, he verges on defining a "musicalization" of poetry and calls forth Valéry's lifelong project.

## NOTES

- (1) Wallace Stevens, The Palm at the End of the Mind (New York: Vintage Books, 1972) p.116
- (2) Joan Richardson, Wallace Stevens, A Biography: The Early Years 1979-1923 (New York, William Morrow, 1986) p.316
- (3) Wallace Stevens, "The Effects of Analogy" in The Necessary Angel (New York: Vintage Books, 1951) p.126
- (4) Wallace Stevens, "The Imagination as Value" in The Necessary Angel p.150
- (5) Wallace Stevens, "Whole Man: Perspectives, Horizons" in Opus Posthumous (New York: Vintage Books, 1957) p.233
- (6) Paul Valéry, "Fragments et mémoires d'un poème," Oeuvres I (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Gallimard, 1957) p.1472
- (7) Paul Valéry, "Au Concert Lamoureux en 1893," Oeuvres I p.1272
- (8) For a full discussion of Valéry's understanding of musical mobility, see "Au Concert Lamoureux," "Léonard et les philosophes," and "Poésie et pensée abstraite," Oeuvres I pp.1274-75, 1267. and 1330 respectively.
- (9) Paul Valéry, "Léonard et les philosophes" Oeuvres I p.1267
- (10) Wallace Stevens, "The Effects of Analogy" in The Necessary Angel p.124
- (11) Wallace Stevens "The Effects of Analogy" p.125-26
- (12) Wallace Stevens "The Effects of Analogy" p.124
- (13) John Hollander, Vision and Resonance: Two Senses of Poetic Form (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975) p.8
- (14) Paul Valéry, "Victor Hugo" Oeuvres II (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Gallimard, 1957) p.584

- (15) See especially Valéry's "Cantiques spirituels," "Victor Hugo," and "Stephane Mallarmé," *Oeuvres I* pp.455, 584, and 667 respectively.
- (16) Wallace Stevens, "The Effects of Analogy in The Necessary Angel p.125
- (17) Wallace Stevens, "The Effects of Analogy" p.124
- (18) Paul Valéry, "Questions de poésie" Oeuvres I p.1294
- (19) Paul Valéry "Lettre à Madame C" Oeuvres II (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Gallimard, 1957) p.1260
- (20) Paul Valéry, "Première leçon du cours de poétique" Oeuvres I p.1349
- (21) Paul Valéry, "Souvenir de Nerval" Oeuvres I p.597
- (22) Paul Valéry, "Première leçon du cours de poétique" Oeuvres I p.1349
- (23) Paul Valéry, "Cantiques spirituels" Oeuvres I p.450
- (24) Wallace Stevens, "Two or Three Ideas" in Opus Posthumous p.210
- (25) See Paul Valéry, "Première leçon du cours de poétique" Oeuvres I p.1349 and Wallace Stevens, "Two or Three Ideas" in Opus Posthumous p.210
- (26) Paul Valéry, "Questions de poésie" Oeuvres I p.1293
- (27) Paul Valéry, "Lettre à Madame C" Oeuvres II p.1260
- (28) Wallace Stevens, "Honors and Acts" in Opus Posthumous p.242
- (29) Paul Valéry, "Léonard et les philosophes" Oeuvres I p.1256
- (30) Wallace Stevens, "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" in The Necessary Angel p.32
- (31) Wallace Stevens, "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" p.32

- (33) Wallace Stevens from "This Solitude of Cataracts" in The Palm at the End of the Mind p.322
- (34) Wallace Stevens, "Two or Three Ideas" in Opus Posthumous p.209-210
- (35) Wallace Stevens, "Two or Three Ideas" p.209
- (36) Wallace Stevens, "The Effects of Analogy" in The Necessary Angel p.118
- (37) Wallace Stevens, "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" in The Necessary Angel p.32
- (38) Wallace Stevens, "Two or Three Ideas " in Opus Posthumous p.209
- (39) Wallace Stevens, "The Irrational Element in Poetry" in Opus Posthumous p.226
- (40) Wallace Stevens, "Two or Three Ideas" in Opus Posthumous p.210
- (41) Paul Valéry, "Cantiques spirituels" Oeuvres I p.455
- (42) Paul Valéry, "Souvenirs littéraires" Oeuvres I p.784
- (43) Paul Valéry "Philosophie" Cahiers I (Paris: Bibliotheque de le Pleiade, Gallimard, 1972) p.516
- (44) Paul Valéry, "Je disais quelquefois à Stéphane Mallarmé" Oeuvres II p.649-50
- (45) Paul Valéry, "Poésie et pensée abstraite" Oeuvres I p.1325
- (46) Paul Valéry, "Stéphane Mallarmé" Oeuvres I p.667
- (47) Paul Valéry, "Ego Scriptor," Cahiers I p.235
- (48) Wallace Stevens, "The Effects of Analogy" in The Necessary Angel p.118

## Chapter Five

### "Pure Rhetoric of a Language without Words":

#### Stevens' Musical Creation of Belief in "Credences of Summer"

From his earliest to his later poems, Stevens longs for respite from the ever-moving world and to feel at one with the world about him. In "The Man Whose Pharynx was Bad," his speaker decries time's motion and wishes that summer would come to rest "lengthened, deepened, comforted, caressed / Through days like oceans in obsidian." (stanza iii, lines 3-4) (1) In "This Solitude of Cataracts," he longs "to feel the same way over and over," for "the river to go on flowing the same way...". (8-9) To feel even a momentary release from the flux would be "enough," cries the speaker of "The Ultimate Poem is Abstract":

It would be enough  
If we were ever, just once, at the middle, fixed  
In this Beautiful World of Ours and not as now,...

Helplessly at the edge... (302, 6-7)

While in many poems Stevens expresses a despair at the relentless change of the world, in "Credences of Summer" he creates a poem, which, more than any other, expresses a relief from the universal flux. In each of its ten cantos, Stevens expresses one way that we can perceive a permanence, a

wholeness in summer. In the opening canto, for example, Stevens suggests that when we set aside our awareness of time, we can then feel at one with the present midsummer moment; in the second, he insists that if we focus exclusively on summer's physicality, we can enjoy a feeling of permanence within the natural world. In each successive canto, Stevens presents a similar poetic premise, another mode of belief in a lasting present.

Yet, similar to the way that Valéry's poem of evening offers us, not a fixed portrait of evening, but a poem that traces the movement of a day's decline, Stevens' "credences" do not, at the poem's end, comprise a unified system of belief nor do they provide us with a still picture of summer. Through a steady, confident voice, rather, Stevens offers us a vibrant summer world -- complete with greenery, roses, hay, birds and their accompanying hymns, silences and birdsongs. Most importantly, though his voice maintains its confidence in the way he urges us to believe in summer's wholeness, it, too, is not uniform. While some cantos express an exhilarating, even an empowering sense of belief in our ability to attain a wholeness within the natural world, others admit more doubt and even question, at times, whether such a permanence is possible.

The critical controversy that has surrounded "Credences of

"Summer" is, therefore, not surprising. While some critics, notably Frank Kermode, take Stevens' marked and elevated tones as their focal point and see the poem's subject as "total satisfaction, the moment of total summer," others concentrate more on its questioning undertones, on the darker poem beneath its jubilant surface. (2) At the other end of the critical spectrum, Helen Vendler sees Stevens' expression of doubt in the poem as an indication of his own inability to sustain attention on the present moment. (3)

"Credences of Summer," however, is a poem neither of total rapture nor of overwhelming doubt; rather, it is a poem that encompasses both emotions. To focus on the degree to which Stevens himself believes in the kind of wholeness he urges in the poem is to dismiss his more pressing concern. For Stevens' aim in "Credences of Summer" is primarily rhetorical: He aims, not to put forth an absolute system of belief, nor as Vendler writes "to chant in orgy to the summer sun," but to persuade his readers (and perhaps himself as well) that, even in our fragmented and disbelieving world, we can still find in our relationship to the physical universe a way to achieve a sense, a feeling of permanence. (4) It is a mark of the greatness and complexity of "Credences of Summer" -- and particularly of Stevens' stylistic and rhetorical skill in this poem -- that

despite its self-doubting moments -- it succeeds in urging us toward the belief that there is indeed a permanence to be found in its midsummer moment.

How, then, does Stevens urge us to believe in a permanence? What form and language does he create in "Credences of Summer" that persuade us, despite the skepticism expressed in the poem as well as our own modern disbelief, to accept such a sense of wholeness? This chapter seeks to answer these questions by illustrating that at the heart of Stevens' achievement in "Credences of Summer" lies his understanding of poetic musicality. "Credences of Summer" may not initially strike a particularly "musical" note; that is, Stevens certainly does not create poetic music in the conventional terms that he discusses in "The Effects of Analogy." (5). However, it is precisely in the ways that Stevens (like Valery) rekindles the musical-poetic analogy -- through his understanding of the non-rational component of poetry and the role that repetition plays in urging us to accept the non-rational or non-verbal "concepts" of poetry -- that are at the basis of "Credences of Summer."

As we have discussed earlier, Stevens believes that poets, like composers, depend on sound to attain a "truth" unreachable through the discourse of reason. In "Credences of Summer,"

Stevens poetically explores this understanding. While summer is most often emblematic of passing time, Stevens reverses such a convention in his poem of summer and aims to convince his readers of the opposite -- of summer's permanence. Stevens creates a form and language in "Credences of Summer" to urge our belief in this paradoxical truth -- that there is a permanence to be found in passing time.

We may remember from Chapter One Valéry's suggestion that poets adopt the musical tradition of variations to present a range of solutions to a given poetic question. (6) Stevens might not self-consciously undertake such a form in "Credences of Summer," yet we could hardly find a more appropriate description of its ten cantos. In musical variations, the composer sets forth a theme or melody and repeats it many times as the piece unfolds, each time in a slightly different manner. Much as the composer of variations, Stevens sets forth his essential theme in the first canto of "Credences of Summer" when he arrests a midsummer moment -- "Now in midsummer come..." (I,i,1) and insists on its totality -- "There is nothing more inscribed nor thought nor felt..." (I,iii,1) In each subsequent canto, Stevens repeats this one theme, somewhat altered: In II we perceive a sense of completion in the "foliage"; in III we find permanence in the "tower," "mountain"

and "man"; in IV we feel the fullness of the "hay" "piled in mows," and so on, through the whole poem.

However, like his musical counterpart, Stevens does not merely repeat this unifying theme. Referring to variations as the "most interesting and suggestive of musical forms," Victor Zuckerkandl offers us a way of reading Stevens' variations. He writes that the composer does not simply repeat one theme; rather "it is repeated and transformed at the same time; always the same and always new. Every repetition represents a new stage of transformation." (7) In each canto of "Credences of Summer" Stevens presents a fresh vision or perception of his main premise. At the close of canto 1, for example, though we feel a sense of unity in "these fathers standing round,/ these mothers touching, speaking, being near...," with the imperative tones of the next canto -- "Postpone the anatomy of summer..." -- Stevens turns us away from the comfort of the previous canto and prompts us to construct anew a manner of perceiving summer's totality. So it is with the structure of the whole poem; while the underlying theme of each canto remains constant, each canto presents, as Zuckerkandl writes of musical variations, not only a repetition of the theme, but a new transformative stage in its development.

On a first reading, Stevens' language in "Credences of

"Summer" seems uncharacteristically direct. With his many seasonal images, he calls on us to experience summer in all its physicality "Without evasion by a single metaphor." (II,11,2) Yet, such directness is deceptive for, as we have noted earlier, Stevens aims, not only to heighten our sensory awareness of the summer, but to create a permanence of that perception. To do so, he forges a language particular to this poem, a rhetoric that enables him to transform his images of passing time -- his foliage, hay, roses, birdsongs etc. -- into images of permanence.

How, then, does Stevens accomplish such a transformation? His essential linguistic method in "Credences of Summer" is the same as that of his overall form : repetition with variation. We have discussed in Chapter four Stevens' use of repetition in "Two or Three Ideas" to convince his readers of a truth unreachable by reason alone. To convince his readers of poetry's equal status with men and gods, Stevens uses repetition with variation to dislocate our rational search for truth, urging us by rhetorical means to believe in the sounds of his words. (8) Stevens' use of repetition in "Credences of Summer" is hardly as straightforward as his method in "Two or Three Ideas"; however, the same principle applies to his language in this poem.

Stevens uses a restricted vocabulary in each of the poem's ten cantos, repeating images, words and groups of words often twice and as many as four times within the three stanzas that compose each canto. For example in VI, we hear "rock" repeated four times; "truth" repeated twice, and "half," four times. Yet, Stevens does not repeat these words for their sound alone; rather, as he repeats familiar images and sounds, he adjusts our view of these images much as he shifts the order in which he repeats "styles of men, gods and poems" in "Two or Three Ideas." To adjust our perspective, Stevens uses appositions that resist our immediate understanding and that serve to invert the meaning of the repeated images. For example, the solid rock that "rises from the land and sea" that opens canto VI is only "half way" solid. When Stevens refers to its "immeasurable half," he transforms a finite image of summer -- the "mountain half way green"--into the permanent rock of summer -- "such rock as placid air becomes," the rock that points to the limitlessness of our imaginative perception.

(VI,i,4-5)

Another prominent feature of Stevens' language in "Credences of Summer" is his frequent use of superlatives and words designating the absolute. In the first canto, for example, the speaker of the poem asserts that this summer day

is the "last day of a certain year / Beyond which there is nothing left of time"; in canto II, he urges us to see "the very thing and nothing else." Such words ring through the whole poem, sounding a note of urgency.

A cornerstone of Stevens' redefinition of modern poetic music is his belief in the unity of style and meaning. Like Valery, he asserts that we find meaning in poetry not in our understanding of its discursive content, but rather in our attention to the voice that issues from its style -- the "voice that is inevitable." (9) As we now turn to take a closer look at "Credences of Summer," we look to illustrate the workings of its musical structure and rhetorical method not to discover a tangible meaning, but to show how the voice that emerges from its form (or style) urges us to search the sound of its words for the "unalterable vibration," that sense of completion that Stevens maintains is the principal object of poetry. (10)

As a composer of variations sets forth the essential theme of his or her piece in the opening bars of a composition, Stevens similarly sounds the theme that underlies "Credences of Summer" in his opening canto. He immediately reverses any expectations we might have of summer's ephemeral nature by focusing our attention solely on the present and, in the movement from the first to the third stanza, urges us to feel a

sense of totality in the midsummer moment. In his presentation of this central theme, we can discern the main characteristics of Stevens' rhetorical method in "Credences of Summer" as a whole: His repetitions, appositions and superlatives give rise to the confident tones of the omniscient voice that persuade us of summer's permanence in each canto of the poem.

Stevens establishes the present midsummer moment as the locus of the poem in its first words -- "Now in midsummer come..." -- and, in its first three lines, without a single pause, he abolishes our sense of both past and future. There are no shades or hints of spring in this present moment, nor does it look ahead to autumn's approach. Rather, Stevens uses language that negates any ambiguity that the season might suggest: "all fools slaughtered"; "spring's infuriations over and a long way/ To the first autumnal inhalations..." By suppressing the verb "are" in the first few lines, Stevens further telescopes time, urging us to focus exclusively on the present moment.

In contrast to the swift pace of its first few lines, once Stevens presents the world of midsummer, he invites us to linger in its satiate images. While born in spring, the "young broods" rest in the summer grass, the roses do not foretell their own (nor Beauty's) decline; rather, they are full of

their own substance, " are heavy with a weight of fragrance."

And the mind, unhampered by the fury of the past and anticipation of the future, simply "lays by its trouble."

Especially following upon the suppression of the verb "are" in its opening lines, Stevens' repetition of the verb "are" in its closing lines contributes to the sense of stasis that his images suggest.

Stevens intensifies our sense of the present in the second stanza. In the first line of stanza two -- "Now the mind lays by its trouble and considers," -- he repeats both the "Now" that opens the poem and the closing words of the previous stanza -- "the mind lays by its trouble." By repeating both the beginning and end of the first stanza, Stevens prompts the reader to recall the temporal note of the poem -- the process of perceiving the present moment -- thereby intensifying our sense of the present time. In the rest of stanza two, he adds not a single image of summer; he shows us, rather, how the mind contemplates the midsummer moment. And, as the mind "considers" this moment in time, it reflects and repeats the process established in the first stanza. In lines two to four, the mind recalls the abolishment of past and future time. All past time, reduced to the "fidgets of remembrance," converges at the present: It "comes to this." So pervasive is the

present that the mind cannot even see beyond it "to the first autumnal inhalations"; rather, using language that asserts the total negation of the future, the speaker asserts that we cannot see anything beyond this moment: "This is the last day of a certain year/ Beyond which there is nothing left of time." (I,ii,3-4)

Stevens reasserts the totality of the present moment once more in the last line -- "It comes to this..."; however, in these words he suggests the bounty to be found within this arrested moment. For it comes to "this" and the "imagination's life." While the moment is all we have, we also have all our imagination can perceive within this moment.

If, in the first stanza, Stevens presents the centrality of the summer day and in the second, he intensifies our perception of its totality, in the third stanza he asserts that this vision, though perhaps contrary to our accepted notions of summer, is the truth: He thus carries his poetic proposition to its imaginative utmost. The stanza begins with a strong sense of continuity as Stevens again opens with a repetition that echoes the previous stanza -- "There is nothing more..." (echoing "There is nothing more of time"). Stevens emphatically insists on the moment's totality in his assertion that not only is "there nothing left of time," but that much as

we might yearn for something that reaches beyond the present moment, -- a divinity perhaps -- "There is nothing more inscribed nor thought nor felt..." (I,iii,1)

While the repetitions of negative tones suggest a mournful mood, the speaker inverts such a mood with the sounding of "This"; it is this moment and the totality that we feel within it "that must comfort the heart's core against its false disasters." With the apposition "false disasters," Stevens accomplishes the logical reversal that underlies the poem. While disasters usually refer to events that are inevitable, Stevens' speaker insists upon the opposite: So entire is our experience of summer that, seen in this context, all that diverts us from the moment becomes "false." What is true is not what we remember, nor what we anticipate, but what is immediate, what is in progress. The rapid pace of stanza three rather suddenly comes to a halt as Stevens urges us to feel at one with "these fathers standing round, these mothers touching, speaking, being near, / These lovers waiting in the soft dry grass." (I,iii,3-5) With the succession of present participles, Stevens closes the canto, steeping us in a sense of the permanence of this summer moment.

Stevens' presentation of the theme of "Credences of Summer" acquaints us with the language and rhetorical method of

the whole poem. Repetition is clearly his main method: Stevens uses quite a restricted vocabulary in these three stanzas and though he does not repeat his most sensory images, by repeating demonstrative adjectives and whole groups of words --"now," "come," "are," "the mind lays by its trouble," "this," "these," -- he keeps our attention focused on the present moment. If, as readers, we cannot so easily suspend our disbelief in such wholeness or permanence, Stevens further urges our acceptance by his use of language designating the absolute throughout the canto's three stanzas: "All," "over," "first," "last," "nothing." Together with his insistent repetition, Stevens' use of such words creates an emphatic tone that culminates in the message of the closing stanza: The only "truth," the only sense of permanence we shall have, is to be found in our experience of this summer moment; any suggestion of a truth beyond this moment is false.

While Stevens does not compose "Credences of Summer" in conventional poetic form, he does create a very definite rhythm in the poem that contributes to its heightened or elevated tone. We can see this rhythmic progression in all cantos of the poem; yet, perhaps, most clearly in the opening canto. Generally, Stevens presents the theme or premise of each canto in a triplet progression: In the first stanza he presents the

subject of the poem --the midsummer moment; in the second stanza, as we have seen, largely through repetition, he intensifies our sense of that moment; and, in the third stanza, he carries or draws the theme to its extreme (This moment "must comfort the heart's core..."). In addition to this progression by threes, Stevens also frequently presents his images in threes. For example in stanza 1, once he has abolished past and future time, he offers us three images of the presence of the immediate moment: "broods," "roses," and the untroubled mind. In stanza three again, once he asserts the absolute truth of the present moment, he presents us with three images of the moment's completion: "fathers," "mothers," and "lovers." We should also note that there is a threefold development in the mothers' movements -- they are "touching, speaking, being near." While this triplet rhythm might not be so easily delineated in all the cantos of "Credences of Summer," such a pulse underlies the poem, contributing to its persuasive tone.

Stevens develops the central theme of "Credences of Summer" -- that there is a permanence in this midsummer moment -- in the second canto of the poem with the same sure tones of an omniscient voice and in the same rhythmic progression: In the first stanza he isolates the summer, urging us to see the

season in and of itself; in the second, he intensifies our vision of the sun and sky; and in the third, he asserts the ultimate truth of this summer moment. However, for all the similarities in theme, voice, rhythm and method, the second canto of the poem is not a mere repetition of the first.

Rather, Stevens alters both theme and voice in his second canto and deepens the complexity of the poem.

If in the opening canto Stevens sets the temporal note of the poem, in the second he shows us more specifically how to see in this temporal context, how to look at the physical images of summer -- sun, sky, and foliage -- so that we find their permanence. While Stevens still speaks in the sure omniscient tones of the first canto, with the series of imperatives that impel the movement of canto II ("Postpone," "Trace," "Look at," "Fix," "Fill," "Exile"), he creates a more heightened tone that adds a strong note of urgency to the poem.

Stevens' call to "Postpone the anatomy of summer," urges us to cast aside our analysis of the season and, as in canto I, to focus entirely on the present. Such a call re-establishes the temporal key of its opening canto: To put off a study of summer we must again turn away from examining its relation to past and future, and see it exclusively as a present reality.

While the repetitions that mark his command approximate

(in sound) our need for analysis -- "the physical pine, the metaphysical pine" (II,i,2) --, Stevens abruptly turns us away from such yearning and summons us, more personally and directly than in the opening canto, to join him in his quest to see the summer itself. However, Stevens' "invitation" is not a casual one for us to delight in the colors and shapes of summer. With his insistent repetitions -- "Let's see the very thing...," "Let's see it...," and his use of superlatives and absolutes -- "the very thing and nothing else," "the hottest fire of sight," he initiates us into a completely new mode of vision.

(II,i,3-4)

To see along with him "the very thing" is not to see with ordinary vision; rather, in Stevens' call to "Burn everything to ash", he initiates us, as through a ritual by fire, into a purified vision of summer. (I,i,5) Stevens suggests, in this last line of stanza one, that to see with such charged vision is to penetrate to the very essence of things. Paradoxically, such charged or purified vision yields us just that understanding that we seek through analysis ("the anatomy of summer"): When we see the whole -- "Burn everything, not part of it..." -- we gain an intrinsic knowledge of its composition -- "to ash." (I,i,5)

Once initiated into a way of seeing, Stevens elaborates on

this mode of vision. With a series of imperatives that creates an ever-heightened tone and rapid pace, Stevens shows us in the second stanza how to see the summer sun and how to claim its permanence.

Though we might ache to find god-like figures in the skyscape, Stevens insists once more that we cast aside "the metaphysical pine," though this time his directions are more specific: We are to "Trace the gold sun about the whitened sky / Without evasion by a single metaphor." (II,ii,2) When Stevens emphasizes that we must not employ even a "single metaphor" he points to our great propensity to transform the natural images about us -- here, the sun and sky -- into images of our desire (metaphor!) as well as the depth of concentration that we must exert in order to see the summer images without the help of metaphor.

In the commanding tone that increases in intensity with each successive imperative, Stevens then urges us to "Look at it in its essential barrenness." (II,ii,3) While to see the essence of the sun might suggest a thorough examination of its substance, Stevens argues the opposite with his apposition "essential barrenness," again pointing to the paradox that underlies the poem: Only if we set aside our need for analysis and, as initiates of Stevens' new way of seeing, look closely

at the bare form of the sun can we discover its essence. To underscore the fragility and treasure in such vision, Stevens directs us, without a pause between lines three and four, to proclaim this perception as the object of our search. By using the personal pronoun "I," (the only time in the poem), Stevens at once emphasizes our participation in this process of vision and stresses how important it is for us to recognize and articulate this vision as the object of our discovery:

And say this, this is the centre that I seek.

Yet, we must not only speak this discovery; Stevens further insists, in the last imperative of stanza two, that we place the sun in its proper context: "Fix it in an eternal foliage." (II,ii,5) Most often representative of impermanence, Stevens argues, in the closing apposition of the second stanza, that the summer foliage is permanent: So piercing is our heightened vision of the sun that it enables us to discover a permanence encased in its ever-changingness.

By way of both his direct, commanding tone and the rapid succession of imperatives in the first two stanzas -- there are eight imperatives in ten lines -- Stevens urges us, as readers, not to pause over the lines to question his way of seeing, but rather to follow without hesitation. In the uninterrupted movement from stanza two to stanza three, Stevens again asks

that we unhesitatingly accept this vision of summer and, when he adds yet another imperative -- "And fill the foliage with arrested peace" -- he demands not only that we accept this vision, but that we accept it as the ultimate, the final image of summer. It is here, then, that Stevens slows the swift pace of the canto and, as in the third stanza of his opening canto, draws his poetic premise to its extreme: Only by fixing our vision of the present midsummer moment do we find our sense of completion -- the "arrested peace," the "Joy of such permanence" that has been the object of our search.

(II,iii,1-2)

At the same time that Stevens urges us to claim the "Joy of such permanence," there is, however, both in the language and halting rhythm of this last stanza, a subtle suggestion that, while we might find a sense of peace and a feeling of permanence, that it is still one that we have contrived: The peace is "arrested,"; the permanence is not "absolute." Rather, it is "such permanence," the permanence that we can attain only by our willingness to put aside desire, to "Exile desire for what is not." (II,iii,3-4) Only through the series of definite steps, only through such concentrated acts of vision can we find a sense of the permanence that we long for: "the barrenness/ Of the fertile thing that can attain no more."

(II,iii,4-5)

The pattern of repetition and variation that we find in the movement from cantos one to two is paradigmatic of the whole of "Credences of Summer." In each successive canto, Stevens varies his presentation of its essential theme -- that there is a permanence to be found in our experience of summer -- and deepens its complexity. In the next two cantos (III and IV) Stevens again repeats and varies his essential theme. With his image of the "tower" in canto III, he adds a spatial and mythical dimension to the poem. He insists that seen as center, or "axis," the tower presents us not with a view of distance, but rather with the more precious view of our immediate environment. In the second stanza, he intensifies this premise and adds a mythical dimension to the poem. With the tower as "point of survey," we gain access to a land of fulfillment. Stevens animates the world of this stanza with images that suggest those of myth: His "folk-land, "mountain," and "sleepless sun" call to mind, not the specific landscape or personages of myth but, rather, evoke the sense of fulfillment they once embodied. In the third stanza of III, Stevens characteristically draws the poetic premise to its utmost: Though not a god, the "old man" is emblematic of the solace we once expected to find in one. Stevens suggests in this figure

of the all-knowing, natural man that once we accept the centrality of the summer day, we bring the gods to earth and discover a sense of divinity in our feeling of oneness with the physical universe.

Stevens adds a sensory dimension to "Credences of Summer" in the fourth canto. While in cantos II and III, he demands that we restrict our vision of the moment so that we see the midsummer day more clearly and fully, in the fourth canto, by intensifying our perception of the day in sight and sound (and the way the senses intermingle), he places us firmly within the context of such a day. Not only does Stevens achieve a quieter tone, but the poem reaches a point of stillness or stasis.

We discussed in earlier chapters Valery's and Stevens' understanding that poets use the words of poetry to create a state rather than a paraphrasable meaning. (11) Here Stevens accomplishes exactly that: In the way he uses the sounds of words in stanza one, for example, he creates in auditory terms, the state of absolute stillness characteristic of this midsummer day. With each successive vowel repetition -- "reality," "Oley," "hay," "Baked" "through," "long," "days," "piled," "mows" -- Stevens creates an elongated sense of time which both arrests the moment and fixes our eyes on the "hay/ Baked through long days piled in mows." (IV,i,2-3)

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The sensory fabric of the poem becomes more complex in the second stanza as our vision merges with sound. Sibilants accumulate throughout its five lines --"secondary," "senses," "swarm," "secondary," "sounds," "last sounds," and culminate in the resounding silence of the day. Stevens emphasizes that the sounds of the day are not "simply" sounds -- as the physical sounds, for instance, of a tractor or the sounds of voices in the thick air -- but, rather the sounds of our imaginative perception in his apposition "secondary sounds." While sound refers to an immediate, tangible, physical sense, "secondary" has a more abstract connotation. Stevens' use of a language of the absolute underscores the more abstract qualities of these sounds: Unlike musical sound, they are "Not evocations, but last choirs, last sounds/ With nothing else compounded, carried full..." (IV,ii,3-4) Like the poetic language that he will point to two years later in "The Effects of Analogy" so expressive of the analogy between nature and the imagination that it surpasses words themselves, Stevens' sounds of Oley are so perfectly expressive of the summer that they exceed sound; they are the "Pure rhetoric of a language without words." (12)

For all of its rhythmic consistency and its sustained elevated tones, Stevens' voice in "Credences of Summer," at moments, expresses a strain of doubt. In the third stanza of

the first canto, we noted the repeated mournful tones; in the last stanza of canto II, we discussed the halting or forced rhythm that betrays a knowledge of the contrived nature of our newly-discovered permanence. Such expressions of doubt underlie the poem and, as many critics have noted, reach a crisis point in canto V, midway through the poem, when, rather than focusing our attention exclusively on the present moment, he questions the relationship of this day to all others:

One day enriches a year. One woman makes  
The rest look down. One man becomes a race,  
Lofty like him, like him perpetual.  
Or do the other days enrich the one? (V,i,1-4)

Helen Vendler sees a dissolution of the identity between "man and the environmental moment" in canto V "with the entrance of the analytic mind, with the change from description to interrogation." (13) And while Harold Bloom sees more celebration in "Credences of Summer" as a whole than Vendler does, he too finds here a "sorrow that infiltrates the poem." (14)

That Stevens opens canto V on a self-doubting note is indisputable: By questioning the relation of this day to all others, he violates the premise on which he bases his earlier cantos -- that we must turn away from past and future to feel the present (I); that we must "Postpone the anatomy of summer"

to gain a vision of the permanent present (II). However, to see Stevens' expression of doubt in the poem as undermining the primary theme of wholeness is not to grasp its part in the musical whole of the poem. More than threatening its tone of confidence, Stevens draws the doubts that underlie the poem to the thematic surface in canto V much like a composer of variations develops a sadder counterpart to an essentially joyful piece -- not to question the predominant joy of the piece, but to express a mournful strain within the greater joy. When Stevens admits the "melody" of doubt in "Credences of Summer" he is not denying belief; rather he is expressing the doubt implicit in any system of belief. (15) When he questions the relationship between this day and all others and then returns, in the second and third stanzas, to the rhetorical mode of the poem, he suggests that even in the midst of our questions and doubts, the day asserts its presence.

The bristling soldier, weather-foxed, who looms  
 In the sunshine is a filial form and one  
 Of the land's children, easily born, its flesh  
 Not fustian (V,ii,2-5)

As an answer to the abstract questions of the first stanza, Stevens presents the day in all its concreteness. In his figure of the day as a "bristling soldier," he emphasizes its strength. As a "soldier," "filial form," and as "one/Of the land's children," the day is at once a whole in itself and part

of a greater whole.

Even more important than the way his images respond to the stanza's questions are the way Stevens' repetitions urge us to turn away from this intrusion of logic. With his repetitions of "f," "sh," and "ch" -- "Bristling soldier," "weather-foxed," "sunshine," "filial form," "children," "flesh," "fustian," -- Stevens prompts us to listen to the sounds of his language, as he has in each previous canto -- to quit our questioning and return to the day's physical presence.

Stevens not only draws the doubtful strain of the poem to its fullest expression and restores the poem's tone of confidence in canto V; as the center point of the poem he, rather musically, draws its theme to a peak. When he proclaims in the third stanza (and characteristically most charged) the answer to its opening questions -- that the day is simultaneously a part and a whole that "... the more than casual blue

Contains the year and other years and hymns  
And people, without souvenir"

he, for the first time, repeats words and images from previous cantos and draws the body of the poem together. The "hymns" recall the mythical "marriage hymns" of canto III; the "people" recall both the satiate figures of the first canto -- the

fathers, mothers and lovers -- as well as the third canto's "old man" and humanized sun. A few lines later when Stevens refers to this day as "Stripped of remembrance," he also urges us to recall the "fidgets of remembrance" of canto I. By so sounding these familiar images and figures, Stevens extends the particular theme of this canto to our understanding of the poem itself. The people and hymns are -- as each canto of the poem is to the whole of "Credences of Summer" -- at once wholes in themselves and parts of the larger whole. To underscore the power in such understanding, Stevens closes what began as the most reflective and doubting of all the cantos with a triple image of the day's strength: "The youth, the vital son, the heroic power," and boldly reasserts the persuasive rhythmic pulse of the poem.

A striking tone of triumph characterizes the next three cantos of "Credences of Summer." It is as though once Stevens confronts his doubts and finds a way to incorporate them into his vision of midsummer, he reasserts his belief in the day's permanence with even more conviction. With this renewed sense of belief comes a change in the tempo of the poem: The quieter movement of cantos III, IV and V gives way to a sharper, livelier movement in cantos VI, VII and VIII. As Stevens focuses on the imaginative promise of belief in the day's

physical presence in VI and then draws the theme of song and music directly into the poem in VII and VIII, he creates an effect very much like that of a musical crescendo.

Stevens opens canto VI with the certainty of the poem's very first canto -- "The rock cannot be broken. It is the truth." Yet, while at the beginning of the poem Stevens arrests the midsummer moment and only hints at the world to be discovered in the "imagination's life," here, just as soon as he asserts the physical truth of summer he insists upon the infinite promise of our imaginative perception of "the rock":

The rock cannot be broken. It is the truth.  
It rises from the land and sea and covers them.  
It is a mountain half way green and then,  
The other immeasurable half, such rock  
As placid air becomes... (VI,i)

The "rock of summer", then, is both the physical rock -- "It rises from the land and sea" -- and the way we see the rock. While the truth originates in our ability to see its physical reality, in the very act of seeing, our vision becomes part of its reality, part of the "truth." The rock is, as we have pointed out in our discussion of Stevens' use of language in the first pages of this essay, only "half way green." Its "other immeasurable half" is the part of the truth limited only by the boundaries of our imaginations.

That an interdependence between reality and our

imaginations is essential for us to achieve a notion of the truth of summer is clear in the way Stevens equally emphasizes both in this stanza: His repetitions of "It" that ring through its five lines -- "It is the truth," "It rises from land and sea," "It is a mountain," "But it is not" -- urge us to keep our eyes fixed on the physical rock, at the same time that his appositions -- "half way green, "immeasurable half" -- show us the imaginative counterpart to the rock -- "such rock as placid air becomes," the imaginative "truth" to which we gain access when we perceive the rock in all its physicality.

Stevens emphasizes this necessary interdependence in the way he structures the rest of the canto: In the second stanza he stresses the importance of our perception of the physical, "visible rock." That he believes that it is only in our thorough physical grounding that we gain entrance to the truth is clear from the abundant repetitions and charged language of this stanza. Its every word is either a repetition or an enhancement of one that has come before. Even just noting the repetitions illustrates Stevens' concern for our acceptance of this physical truth -- not/ A hermit's truth nor symbol in hermitage," "truth," "It is," "rock," "repose," "certain," "certainty." Extending his apposition of the "mountain half way green" (stanza 1), Stevens draws his poetic premise to the

extreme in the third stanza. The truth, our feeling of oneness, of wholeness with the universe is composed both of our perception of the physical mountain "A mountain luminous half way in bloom" and of all our imaginations see in that physical mountain/summer:

And then half way in the extremest light  
Of sapphires flashing from the central sky  
As if twelve princes sat before a king. (VI,iii,3-5)

With the opening stanza of canto VIII Stevens abruptly shifts the jubilant tone with which he closes canto VII. Though we feel the infinite promise of our imaginative vision of the summer rock at the close of canto VII, with canto VIII Stevens repositions us -- amidst the singers distanced from the object about which they sing.

Far in the woods they sang their unreal songs,  
Secure. It was difficult to sing in face  
Of the object. The singers had to avert themselves  
Or else avert the object. Deep in the woods  
They sang of summer in the common fields. (VII,i)

If in canto VI Stevens offers a picture of how boundless a world we can find in our appreciation for its physical reality, in the above stanza he shows us the disastrous consequences that result from a disjunction between reality and the imagination. From the beginning of the opening stanza to its close, the pervasive image is one of distance and inaccessibility; the singers are "Far in the woods." While

song is often an expression of spontaneity, of the close relation between the singer's personal or inner world and the external world, with his apposition "unreal songs," Stevens strips the song of its binding force and reinforces the idea of distance with which he opens the stanza. He further underlines this disjunction in the singers' constant repositioning -- "The singers had to avert themselves/ Or else avert the object." In the closing image of the stanza he echoes its first words and presents a reason for their songs' unreality: "Deep in the woods/ They sang of summer in the common fields." For the song to sound the truth, for the song to be "real," it must express the relation between the singer and the present, immediate world. Stevens' singers, rather than proclaiming the present as their song (as Stevens urges in each successive canto ) "sang of summer in the common fields."

Consistent with his method throughout the poem, Stevens elaborates in the second stanza on the poetic premise of the first. Stevens points to a growing paralysis born of the singers' inability to bridge the distance between themselves and the object of their desire

They sang desiring an object that was near,  
 In face of which desire no longer moved,  
 Nor made of itself that which it could not find...  
 (VII,ii,1-3)

Stevens' language grows more and more abstract in the first few

lines of stanza two. His repetitions -- "They sang," "in face," "object," -- certainly do not reinforce the sense of immediacy that they have in each preceding canto; rather, together with his abstract language, they draw us into the singers' lack of focus. With the pause that follows, Stevens underscores the singers' impasse and intensifies the already pervasive sense of distance.

By breaking the jubilant tones of the previous canto and by removing us from the summer as center, does Stevens once more threaten the predominant confident tone of the poem? The answer is emphatically no; such a presentation of distance serves Stevens' larger rhetorical purpose. He shows us the singers' paralysis, even draws us into the singers' loss of their object only to reassert the predominant theme of the poem and his belief in the centrality of the present. After the painful pause of line eight, Stevens abruptly changes his focus -- from the past -- from the distanced, disengaged singer -- to the present, to the self, the one singer (Stevens himself?) who reclaims the present as his turf and celebrates the prize:

Three times the concentrated self takes hold, three times  
The thrice concentrated self, having possessed

The object, grips it in savage scrutiny,  
Once to make captive, once to subjugate  
Or yield to subjugation, once to proclaim  
The meaning of the capture, this hard prize,

Fully made, fully apparent, fully found. (VII,ii,4 - iii)

Stevens asserts in the rhythm and language of the latter part of canto VIII that to retrieve the present, the self must undergo a process very similar to the one that he has urged throughout "Credences of Summer." It is not through the intellect, through reason, that the singer/self regains the real, but rather through a process more akin to ritual. Stevens emphasizes the ritualistic nature of this process in the way he draws the triplet rhythm into its thematic texture: "Three times the concentrated self takes hold, three times/ the thrice concentrated self, having possessed, / (new stanza) The object, grips it in savage scrutiny...". That the actions of the singer/self also occur in a threefold progression also underscores Stevens' contention that it is through our belief in the present, in the object itself, rather than through our reasoning about the present that we can reclaim an immediacy in our song, that we can find a sense of wholeness.

That Stevens has traced a movement from distance from the real to a revelation of the real is clear if we take a look at the verbal progression of the canto. Stevens recounts the singers' tale in the past and traces the self's recognition and reclaiming of the object in the present tense. However, once he has a thorough grasp of the object, Stevens uses

infinitives: "to make captive," "to subjugate or yield," "to proclaim." Such a verbal movement -- from the past to the infinitive -- reflects Stevens' purpose in "Credences of Summer." We find a feeling of the infinite, of the truth, of a permanence only in our recognition and thorough appreciation of the present moment -- the object, the midsummer moment of the poem. Stevens celebrates this movement from distance to nearness, from disbelief to belief, from impermanence to permanence in the last triplet of the canto -- the object "Fully made, fully apparent, fully found." His repetitions of "F" sound with a particular resonance as they mark in sound the movement from what is "Far" ( the first word of the canto) to what is "found" at its close.

We have stressed in our discussion of the overall structure of "Credences of Summer" the autonomy of each canto or variation. Each canto develops the overall theme of the poem in a distinct way. While canto VIII follows the same general pattern by presenting us once again the same theme through images distinct from those of the previous canto, the two cantos follow one another with more tonal and thematic continuity than any other two in the poem. In our discussion of canto VII we saw how with the images of the singers and their song, Stevens traces the movement from distance to

proximity, from absence to presence, and silence to song. With the sound of the trumpet in canto VIII Stevens sustains the triumphant note upon which the previous canto closes and draws its central theme -- the proclamation of the present -- to a crescendo.

The trumpet of the morning blows in the clouds and  
through  
The sky. It is the visible announced,  
It is the more than visible, the more  
Than sharp, illustrious scene. The trumpet cries  
This is the successor of the invisible. (VIII,i)

If in canto VII, Stevens emphasizes the ritualistic process by which the self bridges the distance between subject and object, in the above lines he stresses that the trumpet, in one instant, sounds the movement from distance to nearness, from the invisible to the visible. With the repetitions and absolutes (the characteristic "rhetoric" of the poem) -- "trumpet," "visible," "It is," "more" are all repeated twice -- Stevens stresses the trumpet's proclamation of the present, "the visible."

It is particularly noteworthy that Stevens uses an auditory image -- a musical instrument -- as the culminating image of the poem. For sound is the realization of the present; the trumpet's piercing sound takes place in time and expresses, perhaps more than any other image could, the

immediacy of the present moment. Stevens emphasizes the trumpet's ability to herald the present summer in his assertion that its sound literally clears the air of all obstruction -- "...it blows in the clouds and through the sky."

Stevens' trumpet, however, is more than another in a series of sounds that proclaim the present. Its insistent sound -- "like ten thousand tumblers tumbling down to share the day..."-- accomplishes, in the moment of its sounding, exactly what Stevens does in the rhythms and repetitions of each successive canto: It calls out, not only its own pure tones, but the central argument of the poem; we must believe in the lasting presence of what we see and hear.

For all of the jubilation he expresses in cantos VI - VIII, Stevens does not close "Credences of Summer" on an unambiguous note of joy. Rather, with the bird's vision and song, in canto IX, he interrupts the poem's celebratory momentum. In stark contrast to the three previous cantos, in which he so convincingly urges us to enjoy a feeling of unity with the natural world, in canto IX, he emphasizes the separation, the distance between our world and that of the birds.

Fly low, cock bright and stop on a bean pole. Let  
 Your brown breast redden while you wait for warmth.  
 With one eye watch the willow, motionless.  
 The gardener's cat is dead, the gardener gone  
 And last year's garden grows salacious weeds. (IX,i)

Stevens characteristically draws our attention to the present moment in the canto's opening stanza, yet, here he emphasizes not our presence in the landscape, but our absence. The bird happens upon the scene and, though it, of course, does not perceive the landscape around it as such, all that surrounds the bird suggests our human separation from the natural world. Though the bird and willow are untouched by time -- the bird simply "wait(s) for warmth" and the willow is "motionless" -- all of the human images are devastated by it. With each repetition of "garden," Stevens emphasizes the reality of time and its effect on our human "arrangement."

Does Stevens' portrayal of the bird and its vision of "the decay of the arranged/ And the spirit of the arranged" present a challenge to his fundamental theme in "Credences of Summer"? (IX,ii,3-4) Is the bird's removed vision of our reality -- "the fund of life and death" -- Stevens' ultimate commentary on our ability to achieve a sense of permanence in the natural world? (IX,ii,5) Helen Vendler certainly sees such a negative commentary in this penultimate canto. In her analysis she points out how each image that Stevens presents in canto IX is the reduced counterpart of an earlier, more glorious image: The tower, she argues has "turned into a beanpole; the green mountain has been dwarfed to a weedy garden in decay, and the

old man has been degenerated into a cock robin perched on a beanpole." (16)

Of all the cantos in "Credences of Summer," canto IX is clearly the most doubting and the most mournful. As we have shown, Stevens does indeed draw our attention to the present to emphasize our distance from the natural world. However, to see canto IX as Stevens' final statement of the poem is as reductive as claiming that any of its more joyous cantos -- for example, his still, perfect moment in Oley (IV) or his capture of the prize (VII) -- determine the poem's final effect. To understand "Credences of Summer" we must see each canto in relation to the overall form of the poem as well as to Stevens' rhetorical purpose.

In our analysis, we have stressed that Stevens' aim in "Credences of Summer" is to urge us, despite his and our awareness of time and the partialness of our human experience -- to believe in the present -- to feel that we can attain a sense of wholeness. While, in the greater number of cantos he succeeds in urging us to turn away from analysis, from our questioning, to enjoy a feeling of unity with the natural world, he also expresses, as we have shown, strains of doubt throughout the poem. In canto II we saw Stevens' subtle admission of the contrived nature of the permanence we feel,

and we discussed how, in canto V, Stevens departs from the rhetorical mode of the poem and gives expression to the doubts that underlie its more certain tones. To understand "Credences of Summer" as a whole then, we must see canto X not as Stevens' final capitulation to these doubts; but, rather as, once more, doubts that are a part of the musical whole of the poem. If in cantos VI - VIII Stevens draws its predominant joyful theme to a crescendo, in canto IX, he counterpoints such a crescendo by drawing together the various doubting moments of the poem. In the contrast he creates between the bird's perfect ignorance of time and our painful awareness of time, Stevens quietly reminds us of the effort we must expend, the leap of faith we must take, how hard we must listen to and see the summer, to achieve a permanence in this painfully impermanent world.

If Stevens had intended to close "Credences of Summer" with a total assertion of belief or with a total doubt, he might have ended the poem either with the clear tones of the trumpet or with the plaintive tones of the solitary bird. Such, however, is not the case. Rather, in his final canto, Stevens asserts his own omniscience:

The personae of summer play the characters  
Of an inhuman author, who meditates  
With the gold bugs in blue meadows late at night.  
(X,i,1-3)

To interpret the poem's many characters and voices, Stevens

insists, is not his role. Though he can offer us a glimpse of each one as "Part of the mottled mood of summer's whole," once he has given them life, they speak with autonomous voices -- "the characters speak because they want/ To speak..." Stevens thus insists, as he has through his form and rhetoric throughout the poem, that the various cantos or "characters" do not cohere to create one clear or fixed meaning. Rather, the meaning of "Credences of Summer" -- the extent to which we can believe in the presence of summer -- can be determined only by the way we listen to its many and varied voices.

## NOTES

- (1) Wallace Stevens, The Palm at the End of the Mind, Editor, Holly Stevens (New York: Vintage Books, 1972) p.52 All quotations from Stevens' poems refer to this edition. (I,i,1) indicates section or canto, stanza, and lines respectively.
- (2) Frank Kermode, Wallace Stevens (New York: Chip's Booksellers, 1960) p.106
- (3) Helen Vendler, On Extended Wings, Wallace Stevens' Longer Poems (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1969) Vendler develops this argument in the chapter entitled "Douceurs, Tristesses, 'Credences of Summer' and 'The Auroras of Autumn'"
- (4) Helen Vendler, On Extended Wings p.235-6 Vendler writes "The poems do not fail, but the human effort to rest in the present is predestined to collapse, at least for Stevens, who was never a poet formed to chant in orgy to the summer sun."
- (5) Wallace Stevens, "The Effects of Analogy," in The Necessary Angel (New York: Vintage Books, 1951) p.125-26 Stevens refers to the conventional music of poetry as "metrical poetry with rhyme schemes repeated stanza after stanza" and insists that such musicality is "anachronistic."
- (6) Paul Valéry, "Au sujet du Cimetiere marin," Oeuvres I (Paris: Bibliotheque de la Pleiade, Gallimard, 1951) p.1501
- (7) Victor Zuckerkandl, The Sense of Music (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959) p.95
- (8) Wallace Stevens, "Two or Three Ideas" in Opus Posthumous (New York: Vintage Books) p.209
- (9) Wallace Stevens, "Two or Three Ideas" p.210
- (10) Wallace Stevens, "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" in The Necessary Angel (New York: Vintage Books, 1951) p.32
- (11) See especially Valéry's "Poésie et pensée abstraite" Oeuvres I, p.1370 and Stevens' "The Irrational Element in Poetry" in Opus Posthumous p.223

- (12) Wallace Stevens, "The Effects of Analogy" in The Necessary Angel p.118 Note the similarity in language between this canto and the essay: "There is always an analogy between nature and the imagination, and possibly poetry is merely the strange rhetoric of that parallel: a rhetoric in which the feeling of one man is communicated to another in words of exquisite appositeness that takes away all their verblivity."
- (13) Helen Vendler, On Extended Wings p.235
- (14) Harold Bloom, Wallace Stevens, The Poems of Our Climate (Ithaca: Cornell UP 1977) p.244 Bloom maintains that from its fourth canto on, Stevens' tone grows progressively less joyful. He writes "a different sorrow infiltrates the poem...a sorrow that intensifies until it becomes authentic crisis in "The Auroras of Autumn."
- (15) Lyall Bush, "Satisfactions of Belief: Stevens' Poetry in a Pragmatic World" The Wallace Stevens Journal, Spring 1990 p.9 In his study of the relationship between pragmatic philosophy and Stevens' poetry, Bush writes: "Belief, like literature, or language, possesses in its structures what may be described as the capability of displaying its strength most in its ability to dissolve those structures, or more accurately, perhaps, by allowing itself to be dissolved within a 'series' of beliefs, a path..."
- (16) Helen Vendler, On Extended Wings p.240

## Conclusion

Throughout his prose -- in countless notebook entries and in his essays -- Valéry discusses music, and his musical discussions encompass a broad range of topics. He writes admiringly of music's expressive power and enviously of music's ability to simulate movement. Comparisons between music and poetry and discussions of poetry's auditory essence pervade his work. As wide-ranging as his musical references are, one clear strain unites them all -- and that is their relation to Valéry's most persistent abstract concerns and poetic objectives. To articulate the relationship between the human mind and the ever-moving world, to express the boundless nature of the mind and world in a regenerative form is, for Valéry, the aim of art. In music's self-enclosed system of sound, in its mobile nature, and in its contained, yet open-ended forms, Valéry finds the art form most suited to express the universal flux. In all his reflections on music -- from the way he listens to the Lamoureux concerts, to the way he examines the principle of modulation -- Valéry seeks to clarify how music attains such expression. His comparisons between music and poetry, his discussions of aspects of poetry's auditory nature, on their simplest level elucidate the workings of poetry; on

their most complex level they are part of Valéry's broader program to musicalize poetry -- to forge a poetic theory and language best suited to express the constant change at the heart of human experience.

Valéry does not confine his musical reflections to the realm of theory; rather, in his poems he practices his musical scale. Though the poem is critically neglected, it is in "Profusion du soir" that Valéry achieves his most musical poem. Its sixteen stanzas bear a striking resemblance to sonata-form. In the way he voices the poem, Valéry closely approximates the two melodic lines characteristic of a sonata and in Valéry's extremely restricted vocabulary, we can also see his aim to create an enclosed system of sound similar to the musical system he admires. Yet, Valéry does not approximate musical form and language for their own sake in this poem or in any other poem. Rather, the circular form of "Profusion du soir," its dual voicing, its self-enclosed language all enable him to trace the simultaneous movement of the viewer's mind and the passage from evening to night. Valéry offers us in "Profusion du soir," not a fixed portrait of evening, nor a theory of poetic creation; rather, he accomplishes nothing less than his greatest abstract aim: he catches, in poetic form, the mind and world in their fleeting aspect.

We could hardly find two essayists as seemingly different than Valéry and Stevens. Valéry's scholarly, analytical prose seems to put into relief the occasional nature and casual style of Stevens' essays. Yet, when we pursue the faint Valéryan echoes we hear in Stevens' prose, they become stronger and more pronounced. The most consistent theme in Stevens' prose is his concern with the impermanence, the fragmentation that marks the mind and world and their relation to the "path of poetry." (1) While Stevens does not discuss the condition of the modern world nor probe the workings of his own mind as methodically as Valéry, when he discusses the uncertainty that characterizes his time, when he discusses the principle of motion that underlies the natural world and our way of conceptualizing the world, his broad comments sound chords that evoke the full range of Valéry's abstract concerns.

More stunning, however, than the way Stevens' perceptions of the world echo Valéry's is the way he, like Valéry, voices these concerns within a musical framework. Similar to the way that Valéry's reflections about music all relate to his broader aim to express the universal flux in poetic form, whenever Stevens writes about music and the music of modern poetry, he probes his larger abstract aim: to create a sense of wholeness in poetry that remains true to an ever-changing reality.

Whether he is describing the power of narrative music, or reflecting upon what he names the "essential principle" of music (2); whether he is describing the pleasure of the opera or discussing the distinctions between poetic music of "yesterday" and today, each of his comments touches upon his quest for wholeness. (3) Stevens, it must be said again, writes of a more modern poetic music than Valéry; yet, as we have seen, Stevens' discussions of the ways poets use sound to create a wholeness in poetry -- his comments on the primacy of sound in poetry, of how the poet probes the unknown in his use of sound, and his understanding of the process of repetition -- so strongly recall Valéry's program to musicalize poetry, that they mute the formal differences that separate them.

While Valéry devotes as much attention to music in his prose as in his poetry, it is in Stevens' poetry that he displays his musical virtuosity. While critics often point out the abundance of musical figures and metaphors in his poems, they have clearly overlooked the extent to which he depends upon musical forms and structures.(4) We can see this most clearly in the case of "Credences of Summer." Rarely seen for its musical aspects, "Credences of Summer" is as deeply musical in both form and meaning as Valéry's "Profusion du soir." At the basis of Stevens' understanding of poetic musicality is

his notion that the poet uses sound to reach a truth, a wholeness, that cannot be reached solely by discursive means. Such a description perfectly fits "Credences of Summer," for Stevens' aim in this poem is to convince his readers of exactly such a truth -- that there is a wholeness in summer, that there is a permanence to be found in this most impermanent of seasons. Stevens' use of the variation form and his repetitions in the poem accomplish his rhetorical purpose. While some of the voices, cantos, or "characters" speak more persuasively than others -- the trumpet's piercing sound clears the air while the bird's solitary song intones more sorrowfully -- by the close of the poem, by virtue of his form and language, Stevens succeeds in urging us that there is surely a permanence in his voices of summer.

When we listen to the Valéryan echo in Stevens' work and hear Valéry's aim to fix a fleeting world in Stevens' longing for permanence, we do not minimize the differences between these two poets. The vibrant mythical voices and figures that abound in Valéry's poems still offer a contrast to Stevens' barer natural world. Certainly, in prose, Valéry's minute, self-conscious examinations of his own mind markedly differ from Stevens' broader discussions of the life of the mind and world. However, once we perceive the unity between music and

idea in their poems and essays, we see beyond the differences that threaten to close comparative speculation about them, and discover the bond that underlies even works as seemingly different in style and substance as "Poésie et pensée abstraite" and "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words," and "Profusion du soir" and "Credences of Summer." When we appreciate their musical interests as part of their philosophical aims, when we see Valéry's and Stevens' music not only as a means of expression, but as meaning itself, we hear each poet's voice more accurately and fully, and feel Valéry's presence in Stevens' starker poetic world.

## NOTES

- (1) Wallace Stevens, "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" in The Necessary Angel (New York: Vintage Books, 1951) p.32
- (2) Wallace Stevens, "Whole Man: Perspectives, Horizons" in Opus Posthumous (New York: Vintage Books, 1982) p.233
- (3) Wallace Stevens, "The Effects of Analogy" in The Necessary Angel p.125
- (4) This is not to say that many critics do not discuss Stevens' musicality -- John Hollander, Edward Kessler, Joseph Riddel are among those who do acknowledge the depth of his musical imagination. When we consider the scope of Stevens' criticism, it remains true, however, that relatively few critics consider the importance of music in Stevens' work.

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