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JOHN N. SERIO



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Knopf decided on a second edition of 1,500 copies at \$2.50 a copy published on July 24, 1931. Stevens subtracted three poems and added fourteen, the best of which is the wonderful "Sea Surface Full of Clouds," where in five sections of modified terza rima Stevens gives five different versions of the appearance of the morning light on the Pacific, using a partial refrain from Baudelaire's "L'Invitation au voyage." *Harmonium* did not sell everywhere. During the 1924 Christmas season, two young poets, Richard Blackmur and Conrad Aiken, found that the first edition had been remaindered in the basement of Filene's, the Boston department store, at 11¢ cents a copy. They recognized the book's merit and bought all the copies to send as Christmas cards to their friends.⁷ The poet took a more ironic view of the book's sales. Around July 1924, he wrote to Harriet Monroe: "My royalties for the first half of 1924 amounted to \$6.70. I shall have to charter a boat and take my friends around the world" (L 243).

NOTES

1. William Carlos Williams, *Selected Essays of William Carlos Williams* (New York: New Directions, 1969), 12.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Jean Prévost, *La Création chez Stendhal* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1951), 207.
4. Williams, *Selected Essays*, 13.
5. Charles Darwin, *The Autobiography of Charles Darwin*, ed. Nora Barlow (London: Collins, 1958), 87.
6. William Wordsworth and S. T. Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads 1798*, ed. W. J. B. Owen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 115, 152.
7. Russell Frazer, *A Mingled Yarn: The Life of R. P. Blackmur* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981), 99.

3

ALAN FILREIS

Stevens in the 1930s

Play the present

- "Mozart, 1935"

I

Wallace Stevens ended his promising career as a poet once he published *Harmonium* in 1923. He had been a semi-active member of the New York avant-garde scene in the 1910s and early 1920s, and had helped Harriet Monroe's modernist venue *Poetry* get underway by publishing there several poems perfectly befitting the modernist mode. The poems in *Harmonium* are at turns luscious, sparsely ironic, cubistic, rhetorically anti-rhetorical, post-Christian, and minimally meditative; several are brilliant verse exercises in modernist language philosophy. But it is said – no one really knows for certain – that his family and business lives finally held more interest for him than poetry. His was a brief career. Perhaps its implosion was predicted, even necessitated, by the irony and insularity of the poems.

The narrative above is wrong, of course, but it is not an unreasonable story one might have told about Wallace Stevens at the beginning of the 1930s. Here now is another version – more focused perhaps, more overtly political, but presenting something of the same outcome:

The poems of *Harmonium* demonstrated Stevens' modernism, a fetishism of words as words that seemed to stand satisfactorily for loss of depth and reality in actual life in the United States, an elaborate demonstration of social timidity. Here was further new evidence of American modernism's perhaps inherent conservatism. But *Harmonium* was a success, the poems individually striking – even, at times, astonishing – in their alternation of aversion and precision. To be sure, Stevens had been briefly part of the revivification of American poetry following a post-Victorian interregnum of such talented yet forgettable poets as William Vaughn Moody, who sensed that the Victorian mode had become blowsily hyper-rhetorical but could only evoke the dismal situation in formal, old-sounding verse. The overall message of Stevens' poems, if one could be construed, was that things had fallen apart (modernity) and might stand to be put back together in an utterly new cognitive way (modernism). The high hilarity of the "roaring" 1920s, as that decade

advanced, did not offer venues conducive for this kind of writing, an era friendlier to the sensational, flapperish tales of poet and novelist Maxwell Bodenheim or the heartthrob modernism of best-selling verse by poets hailed as true free spirits, Elinor Wylie, Sara Teasdale, or Edna St. Vincent Millay. Then, at the onset of global economic depression, beginning in late 1929 and reaching a nadir in 1932–33, the Wallace Stevens of *Harmonium* became utterly untenable. He was a conservative modernist at a time requiring political radicalism and aesthetic realism.

The publication in 1931 of a new edition of *Harmonium* featuring several new poems, the appearance of new poems by Stevens in magazines in 1932 and 1933, and then a more or less continuous flow of them from 1934 through 1939, and a sequence of three books in just two years – *Ideas of Order* (1936), *Owl's Clover* (1936), and *The Man with the Blue Guitar & Other Poems* (1937) – forced promulgators of the first of these two narratives to abandon altogether their deciphering of Stevens' post-*Harmonium* silence. But, in a way, though it too wrongly predicted Stevens' poetic demise, the second narrative was *strengthened* by what happened to his work in the 1930s.

Let us consider how the next installment of that particular version of the story might go if its point of view were retained and extended to the end of the 1930s, a look back at that tumultuous decade. That tale would run as follows:

Stevens on the modernist right was attacked by detractors on the communist left. He met radical critique head on and badly lost the confrontation. The left vilified him and it only made him more intransigent. What had been playfully ironic in *Harmonium* hardened into an adamant aestheticism in the mid-1930s, much more difficult for readers and fellow poets to swallow in a time of economic privation. Open-endedness now seemed obliviousness. Modernist irony now seemed mere social conservatism. Digression seemed but mere aversion. Clever titles ("The Curtains in the House of the Metaphysician") now seemed somehow intended to provoke or cajole ("The Revolutionists Stop for Orangeade"). It is no wonder that *Ideas of Order* received a stinging, negative review printed in the pages of the *New Masses*, the cultural magazine of the revolutionary Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA). The reviewer was the communist poet Stanley Burnshaw, a young and little-known political hack, a full-time *New Masses* editor and CPUSA favorite. Burnshaw dismissed Stevens' poems as evidence of incipient fascism. His review did communist dirty work in the war against modernism's willful obscurity and ignorance of political urgency. Stevens was so unnerved by the attack that he wrote a long poem, "Owl's Clover," in response. Blank verse was an unwise choice of mode for responding. The book-length rejoinder is politically incoherent and in all ways Stevens' worst performance. Judging from "The Man

with the Blue Guitar" and other post-"Owl's Clover" poems, we can see that Stevens learned little or nothing – beyond anti-political prejudice – from his one failed encounter with the American literary left, and went his own aesthetic way thereafter, beginning with *Parts of a World* in 1942.

Any contemporary assessment of Stevens' poems of the 1930s can productively begin with the story as told somewhat along these lines. There is plenty to be said for the idea that Stevens mistakenly swerved toward and then away from the left. But this view is at best a heuristic device, and it is founded on all manner of wrong assumptions. Actually, Stanley Burnshaw was a talented lyric poet and no Party hack; he admired Stevens' poetry and genuinely hoped his criticism of Stevens' new poems would engage Stevens in a conversation with the younger radical poets, who read him attentively and longed to learn from him. The brief *New Masses* review was not stinging negative; nor was Burnshaw's position on modernism representative of American communism; nor was Stevens stunned by the review. Nor was he ignorant of communism before its publication; nor was "Owl's Clover," except partly, a response specifically to Burnshaw. The verse in *The Man with the Blue Guitar & Other Poems*, including the long, brilliant title piece, does suggest that Stevens learned a good deal from the interanimations with and among young leftist poets of the time. The very notion that this was a mere "encounter" with the political left – an unfortunate affair, a bumping in the night, an inapt rendezvous – only contributes to a general sense that the 1930s was a bad time for Stevens and (thus) for modern American poetics.

II

In Stanley Burnshaw's personal copy of *Ideas of Order* – it was the same volume given him at the offices of the *New Masses* to read and prepare his review – he marked the following passage:

Is the function of the poet here mere sound,
Subtler than the ornatest prophecy,
To stuff the ear?

(116)¹

Burnshaw's answer to the question was *no*, of course. But so was Stevens'. The poem "Mozart, 1935" answers this question as if it were raised as part of a grievance – answers it directly at first and then more discriminatingly in the poem's last lines. In the end, Stevens will have employed one principle of the literary left to counter another, the main claim against "pure poetry." The use of "Mozart" in the very title indicates that among the several levels of poetic subject-position – Stevens', the speaker's, and the pianist's – the

speaker is most conscious of the inappropriateness of what he calls upon the pure poet to play.

The title of this poem permits Stevens to say for the speaker: *Surely you can find a version of Mozart for this time of crisis, the mid-1930s*. Thus, through the very title – “Mozart” and “1935” separated by a mere comma, suggesting one element inside the other or set in relation against the other – the speaker distinguishes himself from the addressed pure poet (“Poet, be seated at the piano. / Play the present” [107]), implying that if one should be criticized by the left for fingering a divertimento in the year 1935, the attack cannot be aimed at this modern ingénue, who is, after all, tutored by a more conscious poet-figure, the speaker who is the worthier antagonist of the two: he, in short, is the Stevensian figure of capable imagination, sheltering a beset pure-poetry trainee while half-wittingly exposing him to public dangers – imagining a certain outmoded art form as downright instigation, a calling card for political trouble.

The speaker of this poem is willing to admit his audacious sense of cause and effect: he imagines that “they” (unnamed antagonists outside the house in which the poet plays) will “throw stones upon the roof” – while at the same time, somehow, “they” (the very same antagonists?) “carry down the stairs / A body in rags” (107). Stevens here acknowledges extrinsic or extra-aesthetic forces at work on the lyric. One’s arpeggios are perhaps disfigured, not in the way the poet-player plays but by the contemporary (“1935”) hearing the lyric will receive. One can hardly imagine ignoring the stone-throwers, so the murderous, intrusive auditors are themselves making sound in return.

Later in “Mozart, 1935” the speaker urges the poet-pianist to be “the voice, / Not you” – to speak for others as well as to create identity for himself through his art. “Be thou, be thou / The voice of angry fear.” If, in being merely oneself, the artist in mid-Depression must adapt the voice that shouts down one’s art (be thou *that* intrusive voice, decrying thou and the self-reflexive “be thou” mode), then one must bespeak one’s besieger. Finally the piano does smooth over the contradictions of “1935” on one hand and outmoded “Mozart” on the other; the voices raised up by one against the other are “absolved” and “placat[ed]” (107–8; emphasis added).

“Mozart, 1935” is not an encounter with the left, pro or con. It is a poem in which adaptation to extrinsic forces – the “outside agitators” so often vilified in speeches by anticommunists – is enacted and performed, and a poetics that must include politics or be out-sounded is formed before our eyes (or in our ears). Some conservative modernists, such as Harriet Monroe at *Poetry*, were convinced that young poets who had converted to communism were now abandoning lyric verse in favor of what was derisively called

“poetry with a message,” on the assumption that the communists’ insistence on content had unequivocally repudiated the lyric. It had not, as a matter of fact, and the Stevens of “Mozart, 1935” shrewdly knows this. One definition of lyric poetry accepted at this time stipulated that it must be “the product of the pure poetic energy unassociated with other energies.”² What “Mozart, 1935” achieves so interestingly is an integration of those “other energies” – a challenge to the development of the lyric poetic self, perhaps, but not inimical. It was the judgment of a poet-critic named Ben Belitt that Stevens’ new “music is . . . of a more toughened sort, pruned of bravura and merging the logical with the lyric.”³

III

The just-mentioned Ben Belitt was a regular reviewer and assistant literary editor at the *Nation*, a weekly magazine long associated with progressive politics. Belitt was probably the person responsible for Stevens’ receiving the annual *Nation* Prize in 1936. He was given the award for a poem about the Spanish Civil War, titled “The Men That Are Falling.” This poem is surely what one recent critic has called a “curiously ambivalent” elegy.⁴ It certainly has its overt political rhetoric, an almost hysterical command: “Taste of the blood upon his martyred lips, / O pensioners, O demagogues and pay-men!” (174). The “pay-men” must be mercenaries. But whose “martyred lips”? Whose death does the elegy lament?

They are those of a man who has fallen – who has been killed in the strife. The head of the dead soldier appears on the speaker’s pillow and causes a crisis of poetic identity and responsibility. In the view of one eminent critic, Helen Vendler, when the soldier’s head intrudes on “the psychic problem of private misery,” Stevens mistakenly “turn[s] his attention to those moral ‘words’ of heroic action ‘that are life’s voluble utterance,’ insisting that right action is the arena for the resolution of inner pain.”⁵ Vendler feels, as many of Stevens’ critics do, that Stevens’ poems err and misstep when political responsibility limits aesthetic choices. Some readers of Stevens’ 1930s poems have come to doubt that view, and “The Men That Are Falling” is arguably the poem with which to begin an exploration of these basic interpretive differences. Does Stevens’ aesthetic sensibility permit the inclusion of “voluble utterance[s]” without compromise? It does well to think about this volubility in connection with the noisy outside agitators entering the house of “Mozart, 1935.”

Because the Spanish Civil War (1936–39) has become a touchstone for the American cultural left – support of the Republic against fascist insurgents during this doomed struggle, the precursor to worldwide war against

fascism, has been called “the good fight” – there is more than usual at stake among many of Stevens’ readers and critics when they arrive at “The Men That Are Falling,” one poem that seems certainly to set the poet’s apparently characteristic isolation in the specific contemporary context of political martyrdom. Readers of this chapter are urged to consult the poem as an exercise of historical imagination. Contemplate why the editors of the *Nation* would have given it their annual prize. Was it an error, the result of a political misreading? Does the ending of the poem (“This man loved earth, not heaven, enough to die” [174]) merely bring Stevens’ concerns about religion in “Sunday Morning” into the context of the secular, collectivist mid-1930s – but otherwise unchanged? Another view, consistent with our efforts to complicate the usual story about the fate of Stevens’ poetics in an era demanding geopolitical responsibility, is that “The Men That Are Falling” formalizes an American aesthetic policy of isolation by doubting it – by finding in the course of such a meditation that isolation lacks moral legitimacy until private pain can be compared to that experience by a world of sufferers existing bodily beyond the room, as it were, of the poem.

Communists, in their way, understood this too. One hardliner thought it silly that a writer who held an “exaggerated idea of physical action” would feel “certainly . . . that unless he personally and physically fought he could cease to function fully as a writer.” The sympathetic writer’s responsibility was to observe and write, not necessarily to fight.⁶ Once the point of view or perspective of a poem shifted to a place from which the speaker observes rather than engages, the verse might itself create an idea about the very problem of position, and the result might be, ironically, an end to isolation in both its political and bodily senses. The poet Horace Gregory, for instance, was prepared to find in the CPUSA “a hope for the future” and a “necess[ity] for living through these times of terror and destruction,” but he knew enough, he said, to discern just when “it would be an impertinence for me to take sides,” even while always generally endorsing radicalism. Indeed, Gregory’s reputation among mainstream critics became that of “a poet giving expression to the inner intellectual and spiritual strains and dilemmas of the time,” and the typical Gregory poem was deemed “a sensitive instrument on which *the pulls in various directions* are recorded.”⁷ In Stevens’ poem about Spain, there is an incursion into the scene of private invention. The very act of “gain[ing] perspective” – the politics of observations decried by some Marxist critics as counterprogressive and celebrated by others as “sensitive” after Gregory’s open admission (“I must remain in a position to observe,”⁸ he said) – permitted an intensity of engagement that is not rare in Stevens’ poetry but is too little heralded as a quality of his verse in this period.

IV

Whatever else it is, the long poem “Owl’s Clover” embodies an elaborate – at times allegorical – exchange between various advocates of the public and private realms, and it certainly carries on the discussion in “The Men That Are Falling” of the fate of the isolated poet in a time of real political dangers. “Owl’s Clover” asks: “Is each man thinking his separate thoughts or, *for once* / Are all men thinking together as one . . . ?” (583; emphasis added). The diction of the phrase “for once” implies that the speaker believes it is about time for such collectivity, yet we note that people here are not acting or doing but *thinking* together – a gesture, however unifying, that is still necessarily individualized.

This odd poem was first written and published in five titled sections. The second section, called “Mr. Burnshaw and the Statue,” gave the project a referential definiteness that startled and delighted an emerging generation of communist poets (including Burnshaw himself) who were following every eminent modernist’s response to challenges from the literary left, hoping for any sort of engagement, “regardless,” as one communist writer put it, “of . . . even its hostility to communism.”⁹ Stevens had sent the first section of “Owl’s Clover,” “The Old Woman and the Statue,” to be published in a magazine edited by an old modernist colleague – a man Stevens’ own age – who Stevens knew had become a “red-hot”¹⁰ revolutionary. The Burnshaw section of the poem seemed to be both a rejoinder and an accommodation to communist criticism.

The whole poem was published by a small press in 1936. The edition was tiny – just 105 copies were printed – and only a few readers saw this complete version. When the work next appeared, as one of the “other poems” in *The Man with the Blue Guitar & Other Poems* in 1937, published in a trade edition by Alfred A. Knopf, “Owl’s Clover” had been cut drastically by 198½ lines. The titular reference to Stanley Burnshaw had been eradicated; in the Knopf edition, the second section was now titled “The Statue at the World’s End.”

Does this perturbed publication history hint at Stevens’ deferred anxieties about political reference? Did he have almost immediate second thoughts? Which version should we prefer? Fortunately, the Library of America edition, *Wallace Stevens: Collected Poetry and Prose* (1997), offers both versions, and twenty-first-century readers coming across Stevens’ poetry of the 1930s can confront the problem in a way that few people at the time or decades later could. The literary historian justifiably views this as a crucial point, for opinions about Stevens’ political poetry, formed in the 1940s and early 1950s – before the full version of “Owl’s Clover” was republished in

1957 in *Opus Posthumous* – were almost exclusively based on the cut version, with its impalpable and thus seemingly unsure references to political matters and figures.

Although no essay introducing Stevens' response to the political situation in the 1930s can properly avoid this poem, the obligation to discuss it itself raises an instructive question. If it was a bridge Stevens built between, on the one side, poems facing Depression-era social turmoil such as "Mozart, 1935" (or facing emergent fascism such as "The Men That Are Falling") and, on the other, the brilliant aesthetic dialectic of "The Man with the Blue Guitar," then should "Owl's Clover" be read today out of literary-historical interest, as a matter of instruction, a view to a transitional moment? Has the poem become a factoid, a piece of evidence trotted out for quick certification of a gone era to be characterized by the unlyric extremist challenging the great poet? A ham-handed Goliath fitted out by the desperate poet to face the David of the moment? Can "Owl's Clover" be said to fit along an aesthetic continuum (let us say, along an axis running from communism to modernism), or is it stylistically anomalous? And if it is an anomaly, is it then right to draw conclusions about the inefficacy not of antifascist views among modern poets but of antifascist poetry *as poetry*?

Such a fundamental question – it is a question of poetry and politics – cannot be answered for the whole of this long poem in so short a space, but engaged readers, especially those new to the maligned poem, might turn to its lines, to the poem itself, with some fresh sense of the reasons for the vilifications that have rendered it merely historical. The unobtrusive figure appearing in the fourth poem, "the Bulgar," joins people in the park who are "Forgetting work, not caring for angels, hunting a lift," seeking "The triumph of the arcs of heaven's blue / For themselves" (582). Here these working-class people, sharing the poet's public park space, also share his post-Christian dreams of an "imperishable bliss" ("Sunday Morning") postdating traditional belief and now found, as a real alternative, in the lyricism of free space and free time, which the speaker attempts to offer right there in lovely lines describing them on a Sunday, their only free day (and his). However passingly the supposed conservatism of Stevens' characteristic speaker joins in sympathy with the apparent radicalism of the Bulgar's immigrant working-class comrades, Sunday in itself – the park, too, as a merged space – provides the chance for convergence. Such convergences – there are many in "Owl's Clover" – based on continuities from Stevens' pre-1930s modernism, are not well explained by a sudden appearance of political challenge inciting errant reaction.

V

That such a challenge was already inherent in Stevens' writing is made clear by his next major effort, "The Man with the Blue Guitar," which in an experimental, quasi-improvisational stanza form attempted to answer this dilemma: Can a million people play on one string? The conclusion, finally, is *no*, but along the way, in thirty-three stanza variations of offering an answer to this politico-aesthetic question, a great many people get their hands on his instrument. It is as if the radicals outside the house of the poet playing Mozart in 1935 had by 1937 broken all the way into the place, set their hands alongside his on the keyboard and produced a sound that delighted the art's begetter, induced strangely beautiful variations out of him, and taught him that the clashing, jangling, or wrangling of aesthetics could create a new modern sound that somehow accounted for the detractors of its previous impulse to isolate and exclude.

The poem's key phrase – "things as they are" (135) – becomes a kind of rhyming concept, a touchstone the reader's ear will grab to hear something familiar in a poem otherwise so disparate. It is the occasion for an actual rhyme ("You have a blue guitar, / You do not play things as they are" [135]), but the poem is largely made of unrhymed couplets; even rhythmic refrains, after the opening cantos, are few and far between. Nonetheless, "things as they are" is a phrase used twenty times in the poem's thirty-three cantos (and five more times in six cantos later discarded). The guitarist-poet's detractors employ the slogan against him: it refers to the reality they say he does not comprehend and cannot reproduce in his variable art. He concedes that he "cannot bring a world quite round" but counters that he can "patch it as I can" (135) – and so representations of reality are redefined to indicate what exactitudes can be managed. If a "serenade" that is "almost" truthfully human is what can be managed, then that is what is being "play[ed]" musically or phrasally in this poem.

Later, "things as they are" is repeated to reassure detractors who doubt the validity of realism's extended geography; sometimes it seems to be a deliberately empty political gesture, like a verbal half-salute or nod toward idiomatic piety. The dialogue between the imagined and real, thought to be temperamentally aligned with political right and left respectively – of "serene" voices in the clouds (aesthetic conservatives) versus the "grunted breath" of the detractors (aesthetic left) – plays "year by year" (145) a metapoetry, a poetry about poetry itself, in a style that is answerable to both parties at once, poetry that is about the contingent concept of things as they are. At that point the poem has itself become the sort of writing being imagined in this assertion.

Thus the detractors' idea of things as they are, introduced in the opening canto, is again refuted, even as it is borrowed from liberally. Still, a major point against them has been clinched, for even *their* version of the poem is finally a poem about poetry. The centrality of poetics has been re-claimed after initial defeats in the face of reality. This enables us to read subsequent Stevensian provocations – for instance, “He held the world upon his nose / And this-a-way he gave a fling” (146) – as responsive to realists rather than evasive or irresponsible. The guitarist-poet pushes variations of the real so playfully and so riskily far that, when he soon makes a natural, conventional definitional claim – “I am a native in this world” (147) – it strikes us as astonishingly fresh and full of strong sentiment.

Even readers who are new to the tendency in modern poetry to achieve through form what in novels and essays is typically explained through thematics will find in “The Man with the Blue Guitar” a means of discerning why poets feel they must answer questions about content through the way their words, phrases, and lines are organized – arranged on the page, given meter, endorsed, or undermined by choices of tone or rhetorical devices. What is perhaps so exciting about these stanzas strummed on an instrument by a poet-figure thirty-three ways is that form becomes his only means of addressing ethical complaints raised against his mode. “The Man with the Blue Guitar” is a poem that is organized, or styled, to account for charges to be made against the invariability of its ideas about art. It responds through sheer variability and an incessant shifting of positions. These positions are not just political ones, but are also the sitting, or setting, or arrangement that the guitarist-poet takes or assumes in relation to his guitar.

In the opening canto, for instance, the guitarist's instrument is something to be tried on, handled (not just held), adjusted, and maneuvered. In canto II the guitar seems to be an adhesive and an accessory at once. In canto III it is a sharp tool, knife, and hammer. In canto VI it seems to have become abstract although not metaphorical: an apparatus constructed out of place and space and able to resist change. In canto XXVI the guitar is a noisy swarming of thoughts. In canto XXIX it is a way of defiguring a figurative mask. By canto XXXI, two cantos from the end, it is a mode of unanticipated, painful posturing that paradoxically enables subtlety and even inspires rhapsody. In canto IX it is the one thing that embodies the power of invention. In canto XX it seems to have become improvisation itself. The guitarist's guitar is not quite analogous to the poet's poem; the poet's poem is a means but it is also of course the product of the writing, whereas the guitar is almost always not art itself but an instrumentalism, a way of making art happen. On the other hand, the people in the poem who dislike

the art (those called “they” by the anxious speaker, who call themselves “we” in some of the poem's opening ten or so cantos) can be thought of as the same figures whether they assail poetry or the guitarist's improvisations. Although readers wonder at the many forms taken by the guitar – it is an agent, a means, a method, an envoy, a device, a vehicle, a contrivance or gizmo, and also (thanks to Pablo Picasso) a piece of the art itself – a second level of wonderment is required to contemplate how a poem, how *this* poem too, can also be all these things.

Wallace Stevens' poetics at this point will not be pinned down, but this is not a sign, contra the straw-man version of Burnshaw in the tales we sometimes tell about Stevens' 1930s, of the poet's inability to position himself with respect to those political artists who would seem to be his detractors. In “The Man with the Blue Guitar” he modernizes them by the very same strokes in which they politicize him, but he does so only because their concerns have become pressing matters of poetic form. The 1930s was a good decade for modern American poetry, in part because the discontinuities of the New Poetry of the 1910s and 1920s offered the only opportunity for continuity into a new era of concerns about the poet's role in the world of urgently competing ideologies. Surely Stevens sensed this continuity when he decided that the place to publish his first selection of “The Man with the Blue Guitar” cantos was *Poetry*, the venue most closely associated with pre-1930s modernism and, indeed, with the beginning of his own ongoing story as a poet.

NOTES

1. I consulted the copy of this book in Stanley Burnshaw's possession before his death in 2005.
2. John Drinkwater, *The Poet and Communication* (London: Watts & Co., 1923), 56.
3. Ben Belitt, “The Violent Mind,” *Nation* 143 (December 12, 1936): 710.
4. Miltron J. Bates, *Wallace Stevens: A Mythology of Self* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 184.
5. Helen Vendler, *Wallace Stevens: Words Chosen Out of Desire* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984), 20–21.
6. “A Conversation with Claud Cockburn,” *The Review* 11/12 (1965): 51, 52.
7. Horace Gregory, “One Writer's Position,” *New Masses* 14.7 (February 12, 1935): 20.
8. *Ibid.*
9. Alan Calmer, “Portrait of the Artist as a Proletarian,” *Saturday Review of Literature* 16.14 (July 31, 1937): 14.
10. Alan Filreis and Harvey Teres, “An Interview with Stanley Burnshaw,” *Wallace Stevens Journal* 13.2 (1989): 120.