POETRY AND POETICS AFTER WALLACE STEVENS

Bart Eeckhout and Lisa Goldfarb, eds.
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Neither Bart Eeckhout nor Lisa Goldfarb, the editors of *Poetry and Poetics after Wallace Stevens,* is new to Stevensian studies. Together with Glen MacLeod, Goldfarb was also in charge of the special issue of *The Wallace Stevens Journal* (2017) dedicated to teaching Stevens, while Eeckhout worked on such seminal texts as *Wallace Stevens across the Atlantic* (Eeckhout and Ragg 2008) and *Wallace Stevens and the Limits of Reading and Writing* (Eeckhout 2002). Despite numerous contributions of the editors to the field, it seems that *Poetry and Poetics after Wallace Stevens* is their finest achievement so far.

In the introduction, Eeckhout points out the general idea behind the present assemblage of texts, which is "to take a concerted look at the larger landscape of poetry and poetics after Stevens" (5). Indeed, the same is evident from the table of contents, in which texts vary from academically established discussions within American Modernism (e.g. Bonnie Costello's "Frost or Stevens? Servants of Two Masters") to the more rarely mentioned phenomenon of Modernism in communist realities (Justin Quinn's "Stevens across the Iron Curtain"). By presenting such a variety of views as well as repeatedly arguing against the dualism between Pound and Stevens, which was brought about by Marjorie Perloff's well-known article (Perloff 1982), the book attempts to break as many borders as possible so as to start a new, truly open discussion free from dualistic approaches and simplistic solutions.

Ironically, our journey in this brave new discussion starts with the aforementioned article titled "Frost or Stevens? Servants of Two Masters", which naturally evokes the memory of Perloff's piece. Yet, Costello only plays with the idea of a two-folded division of a poetical world. What she explores is the influence of Frost and Stevens on a new generation of poets because, as dissimilar as the two poets' heritage is, their influence sometimes proves to be tied together, not divided, which is shown through the work of two American formalists, Richard Wilbur and Howard Nemerov. The same line of argument is taken by Lee M. Jenkins in her "The Strands of Modernism: Stevens beside the Seaside". Jenkins offers to leave the USA and follow Stevens' connection with Europe, more precisely, the UK and the poems of Nicholas Moore, David Gascoyne, and Peter Redgrove, which demonstrate how significant Stevens and particularly his "The Idea of Order at Key West" were for English war and post-war poetry. The very accurately put conclusion is that the contrast of Pound and Stevens is needless, for the latter's work is a paradox of itself which brings together those opposites that we tend to apply to all poetry of the twentieth century, e.g. 'lyric' vs. 'collage', 'Expressionism' vs. 'Constructivism', 'Symbolism' and its alternatives (38).

Eeckhout's article links Stevens with another distinguished poet, Silvia Plath. "Hearing Stevens in Silvia Plath" attempts to see the relation between the two beyond a rather superficial influencer-influencee perspective so as to view Stevens and Plath as equals. Through the analysis of Plath's "Night Shift", Eeckhout proves that the term 'aesthetic sharing' should be preferred to 'allusion' or 'echo' when discussing Stevens' link to Plath's work. Thus, the article does not confine itself to a close reading of a poem; it also seeks to establish a perspective that will benefit future researchers of poetry and its interconnectedness. For this reason, "Hearing Stevens in Silvia Path" is one of the most compelling articles presented in the book. Another esteemed poet is related to Stevens in the course of the book as Angus Cleghorn suggests a view on Elizabeth Bishop's engagement with Stevens' blank verse. "Moving the 'Moo' from Stevensian Blank Verse" demonstrates Bishop's progressive inclusion of the rhythms we hear in Stevens' poetry into her work.

Next, we come back to Europe with Axel Nesme's "Henri Michaux's *Elsewhere* through the Lens of Stevens' Poetic Theory". Nesme also makes a connection of Michaux with Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*, thus going beyond a purely literary approach in order to embark on one of the most influential thinkers of the past century. As is evident from Nesme's chapter, Michaux was marked by Stevensian views on art and followed his double imperative of "It Must Be Abstract" and "It Must Change". Both form a fundamental part of Michaux's own aesthetics, which Nesme wittily characterises as "dystopian evocations" combined with "macabre humor" (76).

Justin Quinn's "Stevens across the Iron Curtain" is one of the most emblematic pieces of the present collection, for it considers Eastern-European literature, which is often left out of the discussion of Western Modernism. Besides, the article focuses on the almost non-existing influence of Stevens on Czech poets, which is an original angle as well. The study suggests that there are several reasons for Stevens' poetry failing to reach Czech audiences, the most important of them being the literary and political contexts of the 1970s. George S. Lensing starts his "Stevens and Seamus Heaney" with a similar concept of Stevens' (only temporary) non-presence in the UK and Northern Irish literary arena until Heaney and Seamus Deane 'discovered' the American poet. Even more names are brought into the discussion by Edward Ragg, who explores how Stevens' poetics relates to George Oppen and Louise Glück. A possible closure to such a varied discussion of Stevens' relation to other authors is to be found in Al Filreis' "The Stevens Wars", which holds that the Modernist's "effect on poetics has been diffuse and nearly unidentifiable on the whole" (138). As enlightening as Al Filreis' contribution to the book is, the style chosen for it seems too personal for such an academic selection of texts. Similarly to Al Filreis, Lisa Goldfarb in her "Stevens' Musical Legacy: 'The Huge, High Harmony'" concludes that the echoes of Stevensian musicality are countless, as "there may be as many 'Stevenses' as there are poets touched by him" (169). This is also maintained by Joan Richardson's "'Ghostlier Demarcations, Keener Sounds': Stevens, Susan Howe, and the Souls of the Labadie Tract", in which the researcher explores how the sounds of Stevens' poetry became inseparable from Howe's book.

Charles Altieri's "How John Ashbery Modified Stevens' Uses of 'As'" focuses on a concrete trope, which was also employed by Ashbery, although for a different purpose; for him, 'as' is both a complex temporal space and an "opportunity to develop participatory equivalence" (191). Another poet doubtlessly influenced by Stevens is discussed by Juliette Utard, who presents an original commentary on the late poetry of A.R. Ammons in addition to the concept of 'late style' itself. By comparing Stevens' *The Rock* and Ammons' *Glare*, Utard indicates that the term 'late style' is a mere construct, not an established fact of a writer's development.

Lisa M. Steinman and Rachel Galvin deal with questions of race in light of Stevensian poetics. The former's "Unanticipated Readers" offers a more general overview of African American authors who have an active interest in Stevens' work along with examining the reasons behind this interest, while Galvin focuses on the work of Olive Senior and Terrance Hayes, also intending to find an explanation of Stevens' importance for the poets. Both Steinman and Galvin come to the conclusion that the reason may be the aforementioned self-paradoxicality of Stevens, who managed to combine various opposites in his poetry, and it is his

ambiguity and ambivalence that appeal to contemporary poets of African American origin. Galvin also highlights the significance of the "impulse to revise race-based, capitalist notions of property and subjecthood" (241), due to which they shape a new vision on poetry itself.

The book finishes with Rachel Malkin's "'The California Fruit of the Ideal': Stevens and Robert Hass", which presents a somewhat ambivalent view on the relation between the two, for "thinking about Stevens and Hass involves dynamics of pleasure and solace" and of "doubt and guilt" (247). The essay's ending is rather open, as it asks readers: "In making a case for Stevens' poetry, would we wish to make a case for a certain kind of beauty [...] made possible in and by language? And if so, on what ground(s)?" (257). Such a finale seems to be a perfect fit for this thoughtful and truly enriching collection of articles that do arouse an impressive number of original and engaging discussions.

Although quite a few seminal texts offering a general overview of contemporary American poetry have come off the press recently, such as Christopher MacGowan's *Twentieth-Century American Poetry* (2004), *The Oxford Handbook of Modern and Contemporary American Poetry* (Nelson 2012), *The Cambridge Companion to American Poetry since 1945* (Ashton 2013), to name a few, or works focusing on a less broad subject, for example, David Herd's *John Ashbery and American Poetry* (2000) or Andrew Epstein's *Beautiful Enemies: Friendship and Postwar American Poetry* (2006), Eeckhout and Goldfarb's collection is a valuable contribution to Stevensian studies and generally to the subject of American Poetry. Apart from numerous valid points found throughout the texts of the book, its arguably most important input is the variety of perspectives, which allows the book's readers to travel across countries, epochs, races, and old and new paradigms of literary studies. I believe that *Poetry and Poetics after Wallace Stevens* will be of considerable significance for scholars of war and contemporary poetry as well as for anyone with a genuine interest in literature and the history of thought.

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